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Dandy Dick Decoy

BY ROBERT R. INMAN.



FOR SEVERAL MOMENTS THOSE ON THE BRIDGE WERE TOO HORRIFIED TO SPEAK.

Dandy Dick Decoyed;

OR,

The Terrible Tussle at Satan's Delight.

BY ROBERT RANDOLPH INMAN,
AUTHOR OF "DANDY DICK, DETECTIVE,"
"DANDY DICK'S DOUBLE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE COMPACT.

A HARD-LOOKING customer.

Such a man as you would not want to meet in a lonely place at night.

He was dirty, ragged, unkempt and villainous of men generally. But he was astride of a splendid black horse.

As he was riding bareback, however, and had only a hastily made rope bridle, the natural inference would be that the animal had been taken without leave.

The man was of uncertain age, a stubby board covered his face, and he was capped above with a shockingly bad hat and incased below in a pair of the most dilapidated and rusty old boots.

Coat, shirt and trowsers were rags, tatters and patches, and his whole appearance was of the scarecrow order. He had no weapons—at any rate none were in sight, although a leathern belt girdled his middle as with fond embrace.

The afternoon of a fine summer day was drawing to a close.

This villainous-looking wayfarer was riding slowly along through a fertile ravine, following a trail which in turn paralleled the devious course of a swift mountain rivulet.

The man was paying little or no attention to his surroundings, but sat as though buried in thought, his head down and his hands crossed idly before him. On either side the rugged mountains rose precipitously, and not a great distance ahead they drew together, narrowing the valley-like ravine to a canyon.

No sounds were heard save the hoof-strokes of the horse and the fussy murmur of the stream, and there was nothing to arouse the rider from his apparent reverie until suddenly, with a wild snort and a jump that almost dislodged the rider, the horse shied, standing then with fore feet braced and staring with bulging eyes at something ahead.

The rider had looked up quickly, one hand making a motion as though to dive somewhere into his ragged raiment as he recovered his balance; but the motion was checked almost as soon as made, for the man immediately took in the situation and saw what it was that had frightened his horse. Just here the trail wound around a huge boulder, and just beyond, in the middle of the trail, lay the body of a woman.

"Hal! what have we here?" the ragamuffin exclaimed.

Urging on his horse, he drew near and dismounted, keeping the rein over his arm.

The body was that of a young woman, apparently not over twenty-five, and it presented a most shocking spectacle.

The face and hands were smeared with blood and dirt, the clothing was soiled and torn, and the skirt of the dress showed plainly the marks where a horse had trampled upon it.

Suddenly, as the man looked, he gave a start and bent closer.

"By heavens, she lives!"

That exclamation escaped him, and letting go the rein from his arm he knelt beside the body, feeling for the heart.

To his surprise, the heart was beating fully and regularly, and now he saw that the woman was breathing like one asleep. It must be that she was about recovering consciousness.

In another moment a sigh broke from the lips, and she opened her eyes, giving a start as she beheld the villainous face of the unknown bending over her. A cry escaped her, and she quickly sat up, motioning the man to keep away.

"I means yer no harm, miss," the fellow spoke. "I found yer hyer on ther trail, an' I took yer fer dead. What has happened to yer, anyhow?"

The young woman got upon her feet before responding, and looked about her in a bewildered way.

"Is it so near night?" she questioned. "I have been here for hours. I came to when the sun was away up here," indicating, "and tried to get up; but I fainted again, and it must be that I have been asleep."

"I opine that is erbout ther size of it," the

man agreed. "You seem ter be all right ergain now. But yer haven't told me what it was as happened to yer. How did yer ever come ter git laid out hyer in sich style?"

"Ah!" and the woman's manner changed in an instant.

Fire gleamed in her eyes, and her whole appearance was that of intense feeling and a desire for vengeance.

"He tried to kill me—curse him! curse him! I loved him as I love life itself, but he tired of me, and tried to murder me!"

"I knows what yer says, miss," said the man, in a wondering way, "but dura me if I knows what yer is talkin' erbout. Mebby you do."

"Do you doubt it?" the woman fiercely exclaimed. "Did you ever see woman's love changed to hatred? If not, you see it now in me! The man I loved, and for whom I would have give my life, is now the object of my most intense scorn and hate. As strong as my love was—ay, and stronger, is now my desire for vengeance!"

The man drew back from her, as though doubting her sanity.

Without waiting for any response, she raised her blood-stained hands, turning her stained face toward the heavens, and in a voice terribly vindictive, cried aloud:

"High heavens hear my vow! I swear that the man who has done me this wrong shall die, and by my hand! Craig Morgan, if that be your name, nothing shall save you from my righteous vengeance! You tried to kill me; you left me here for dead; but, as the heavens witness my vow, my hand shall deal you the death-stroke!"

Her arms dropped, her head inclined, and she stood trembling.

At the name she had mentioned, the man before her had given a start, and his lips had parted as though to exclaim; but he checked himself.

"It do look as if yer has suffered some wrong, miss," he remarked, in even tones. "Tell me ther bull of it, an' if I kin be of any service to yer, you kin bet yer life I will. That's ther kind of a ha'rpin I am, from ther ground up. My name is Timothy Tough, an' I'm tough by natur', too; but, durn me if I kin see womankind abused. Hyer's my hand on't. Grab onter it, if yer wants my help, an' it are a bargain."

He stuck out his dirty hand; it was silently taken.

CHAPTER II.

THE WOMAN'S STORY.

A MOMENT passed silently.

The woman was the first to speak.

"I don't go much on your looks," she said, frankly, "but I'm inclined to think you mean what you say, and I'm glad to accept your offer."

"You kin bet yer boots I mean it!" the man exclaimed, as their hands now parted. "When I see a woman git up on her ear an' show ther grit you hev jest showed, I'm ready ter back her up, every time."

"Then you do promise that you will help me to square the account with my enemy? That you will help me to avenge myself upon this Craig Morgan, or Devil Duval, as he has been called. What his true name is, if not Morgan, he only knows."

"That's what I said, miss, an' that's what I means, too. Do yer know whar ter find this devil what yer mentioned?"

"Yes, yes! And sweet revenge can be mine before the midnight hour."

"Good enough! I'm with yer, tooth an' nail, an' if yer wants help, hyar's ther galoot what are ready ter lend it to yer."

"But, sir, why should you be willing to do this? We may both be overcome by the wretch, and both killed. Why are you willing to risk your life for such a creature as I am?"

"Wrigglin' snaix! Do yer s'pose that ary man what calls himself a man could see a woman done up as I found you, an' not chip in on her side ter squar' ther account with ther ornery galoot what done it? Timothy Tough ain't that sort, nary time. If yer wants my hand on it ergain, hyar it are."

He extended his dirty fist as before.

"I will take you at your word," the woman observed. "If you are willing to help me, before knowing anything about me, I am sure I can trust you. I am no angel I can assure you."

"Haw, haw, haw!" the tough-looking man laughed. "Thar's a pair of us then, I opine, fer I don't set up ter be no saint myself. As I hev said, I'm Tough by name an' tough by natur' too. I'm willin' ter take ye at what yer is, without no tellin' of yer story."

"Then you have changed your mind. A moment ago you asked for the whole story concerning what had happened to me. I am willing enough to tell it, and if you are going to help me it is your right to know it."

"Waal, fire ahead if yer wants to."

"It is soon told. I met this man first at Denver, and loved him at sight. I knew him then as Henry Dawson. He asked me to elope with him, swearing he loved me, and I was only too willing to agree. I have been with him ever since, and have learned much about him. I believe his true name is Morgan."

"Recently he brought me to this part of the country, and here, suddenly, he seemed to tire of me. He has abused me shamefully, in every way, but I, as a woman in love will, bore it all patiently. At last, however, I came to believe that I had a rival, and that that was why he had tired of me. This roused the tiger in me, and I set out to follow him to-day."

"There is little more to add, as you have seen the result. He discovered me, and knocked me from my horse with a blow of his fist, swearing he would kill me. He dismounted, and the last I realized he was kicking me with all his might, on my head and body. I grew faint, and then all was darkness. You know the rest. Ah! curse him! curse him! This night his life shall pay for it all! If I loved him once, now I hate him—hate him!"

The disreputable-looking character looked at the woman in a strange way while she was speaking.

A light gleamed in his eyes—a strange, baleful light; but it seemed unnoticed by the woman, so intense was her emotion and excited her manner.

"He are a terror, an' one of ther wu'st, I allow," he remarked, "an' you has good reason ter want ter tap his vile heart. I'm with yer, clear up to ther ears, I am; an' we'll make him sick, you bet!"

"But I can never hope to repay you in any way, my friend, and—"

"It don't matter, it don't matter a bit," the man interrupted. "I'll help ye jest fer ther satterfaction it will be ter see ye git bunk with him fer his cussed doin's. You say you know whar ter find him; that's all that's needed. I'll help ye up onto my critter hyar, an' we'll walk chalk in that direction."

"No, no; that won't do. You must leave the horse in some safe place, and we will go on foot. The horse would surely be heard. It is a dangerous mission we are going to undertake."

"Mebby you're right, mebby you are; but, how fur off is ther critter's biolin'-place?"

"It is not more than two miles. Find a place to leave the horse, and in a short time the sun will be low enough for us to start."

"But is yer armed?" the man inquired.

"I have this knife," was the answer, displaying the weapon.

"Good enough. If yer gits a dig at him wi' that, I reckon he will go on ther long trail without shrivin'."

The tough led his horse away, returning in about ten minutes to rejoin his strange companion.

It was with some surprise, as his manner proved, that he found her still in the same sad plight as when he had left her. With the water so near at hand, she had not so much as washed the blood from her hands. If his expression could have been seen under the covering of dirt and stubble beard, it would have appeared a puzzled one.

CHAPTER III.

SPRINGING A SURPRISE.

As before, the woman spoke first.

"I believe I can guess what you are thinking about," she observed.

"An' I'll tell yer, 'thout puttin' ye to any trouble ter guess," the man made response. "I'm wonderin' why yer hasn't washed up a bit."

"I knew it! It is easy to explain. I want to show that infamous wretch what he has done, when I call him to account. Come, let's be going, for the sun is getting low, now."

The answer seemed to satisfy, and as the woman turned immediately and started off, the man followed.

"I want ter understand somethin' about this hyar game," he presently spoke. "What part be I goin' ter play? If you is goin' ter kill ther feller yerself, I don't see as I'm goin' ter figger very big in it."

"Nor have I asked you to," was the response. "You offered, and I accepted your offer, that's all there was about it. If I get the worst of it,

though, and you see that I'm going to be defeated, then you can chip in and help me out. Kill the wretch, if necessary."

"That looks better. I allus like ter know which eend of the stick has got ther taffy on, afore I bite, that's all. You're sot *that* straight, an' you kin' pend on me through thick an' thin. That's ther sort of a galoot Timothy Tough are, every day in ther week an' twice on Sundays."

"It is a bargain, Mr. Tough, so no need to say more about it."

"What sort o' place is it where this gentle sinner are to be found?" the man presently inquired.

"He has a temporary camp in a sort of small cavern, up in the hills," was the reply. "There I have been with him, his willing and loving slave, till to-day. There I will kill him this night!"

"An' nobody is goin' ter blame ye. Are he a outlaw, that he's hidin' round like that?"

"Yes; he is an outlaw. Rewards are offered for him, and he has to be careful not to be seen."

"An' have he any men with him? Mebby thar's a hull band of 'em, an' we'll git a wuss dose 'n we is figgerin' on. Mebby it would pay a hundred cents on ther dollar ter go slow."

The woman stopped short and faced around.

"If you are afraid," she cried, "draw out."

"I only wants ter know what I'm buckin' er-against," was the quiet return.

"Well, I'll tell you. There's two of them, some of the time, and there have been others there."

"How many does yer expect ter find thar now, ter-night? Yer see I am askin' cause I wants ter know, that's all."

"Perhaps two, Morgan and his man, and maybe only Morgan himself. And there may be no one there, if the monster thinks he has killed me."

"Then it seems ter be a leetle onsartain, after all."

"Not for me. I will wait until he comes, if it is a week. But be will more than likely be there. He is trying to get another band together, and that cavern is his headquarters."

The hard-looking man found many questions to ask, all of which were answered with seeming frankness.

Finally darkness settled around them, but the woman continued on, as though every foot of the rugged way was well known to her.

At last she stopped, and whispered:

"We are nearing the cavern. Use every precaution against a noise."

"Bet yer life on't," was the whispered response. "Go on, an' trust to me ter do my part."

"But, danger lurks in every step now, and you cannot be too careful. Let me caution you again. Your life may depend on it, and you may cheat me of my revenge. I must not—"

The man was about to interrupt, impatiently, when, suddenly, strong arms seized him from behind, and, despite his struggles, he was forced to the ground and bound hand and foot, while the woman, with a mocking laugh, ran ahead and disappeared.

Three men had sprung upon the unknown, and his struggles had been useless, though he had made it no easy task for them to accomplish their purpose.

No word was spoken by any, and their prisoner bound, the three lifted him up and carried him away.

What did it all mean? Who was this man—why had he been thus entrapped?

Several rods he was carried, around a bend in the narrow trail, and then into a lighted cavern.

Here he was placed upon his feet with his back to the val, for support, and the three men, masked, faced him.

The prisoner looked from one to another in a dazed sort of way, as though at loss what to make of the situation, and then ejaculated:

"Waal, I ber durn!"

"You will be worse than that, Dick Darrel!" cried one of the masked men, removing his mask.

The face revealed was that of Craig Morgan—the "Devil Duval" of Southwest Colorado.

The eyes of the rough-looking prisoner gave the lie to the character he had assumed. They were scintillating with intelligence.

"You may know what yer is talkin' erbout," he parleyed; "but if yer does, it is more'n I believe. Reckons yer is—"

"Dick Darrel, it is of no use," Craig Morgan interrupted, sternly. "Your disguise is a good one, but it was known to me even before you set out for Satan's Delight this afternoon, and

a scheme was laid to decoy you here. You fell into the trap, and here you are. Ha, ha, ha!"

At that moment the woman came forward, her hands and face having been hastily washed, and put her arm through that of the outlaw fondly.

"And this is my decoy duck," the outlaw added, putting his arm around the woman's shoulders. "She played well her part. Ob, it has been a well-conducted plot, and you see the result of it. You have been overreached, and you can't deny it, this time. I have had a spy upon you, and your plans were known to me. When you set out for Satan's Delight there was only one trail you could follow in the direction you had decided to go. My little aily here undertook to play a difficult role. We stained her with blood, and otherwise marred the beauty of her appearance to deceive you, and when you came along you found her in the trail in a pretended faint. Her story was the bait with which the trap was set. Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

So the heartless villain laughed, while the eyes of the prisoner burned and flashed, and his teeth were hard set.

"You can see how well I planned," Morgan concluded. "You were hunting for me, and here was a chance thrown right in your way by which you could learn the secret of my hiding-place. No doubt you intended to follow the woman here, and then make her a prisoner while you made an effort to avenge yourself upon me. I have been too smart for you this time, my shrewd Darrel, and this will mark your last effort against me. I have grown tired of your attentions, and to-morrow morning at sunrise you will be helped to shuffle off the mortal coil. Men, take care of him, and see to it that he does not escape. Come, Adele dear," to the woman, "let us withdraw. You have earned a kiss of reward for this, and you shall have it."

CHAPTER IV. ANOTHER PRISONER.

"Bryan O'Linn was an Irishman born,
His teeth they were long and his beard was
unshorn,
His temples far out, and his eyes were far in,
'O'm a beautiful creature,' says Bryan O'Linn,

"Wid me rantin', roarin'—"

So sung a lone horseman—if by any stretch of the imagination a man mounted upon a mule can be called a horseman, as he rode leisurely along through a wild, rugged and narrow canyon.

He was a young man, apparently about twenty years of age, with a homely but honest face, and with a pair of deep blue eyes that were full of strength and integrity of character. He was plainly clad, wore a hat that had the appearance of having seen better days in the old country, and carried a gun remarkable for size and bore.

He seemed in the happiest mood imaginable. Riding with careless ease, apparently paying no attention to anything, he was entertaining himself with that rollicking old song.

It was Barney O'Linn, a jolly, happy-go-lucky young Irishman, who was aiming for the wild camp of Satan's Delight, and was now nearing his destination. A couple of miles further would see him at the end of the canyon, and there the camp lay.

The afternoon sun was getting low, and already the canyon was gathering to itself the advance guard of the shadows of approaching night. This the young Irishman noticed, and his heel gave a dig at the mule's flank as he exclaimed:

"Move a little farther wid wan av yer feet, will ye? Sure noight is comin' on, so it is, an' it is divil a wan av us knows the road, no more we do. Git a gait on ye now, or it is lapin' down from here O'll be doin' an' kickin' av some holes in ye."

The animal moved a degree faster, and Barney went on with his song:

"Bryan O'Linn had no coat to put on;
He borrowed a goat skin to make him one;
He planted the hornes roight under his chin,
'They'll answer for pistols,' says Bryan O'Linn.

"Wid me rantin', roarin'—"

And off into the wild, meaningless chorus he went, making the canyon ring with his strong and not by any means unmusical voice.

He seemingly had no thought of danger, and certainly was taking no care not to let his presence be known. In that mountain solitude, his voice could probably be heard a mile away.

After wandering through the chorus of his song and ending it with his wild Irish shout, and then after again addressing his mule somewhat as before, he struck out into the third

verse; but had not proceeded far when he was brought to a sudden halt in a surprising manner.

"Hands up, there!" and just ahead of him, in the gathering gloom, stood a man with a brace of revolvers.

"Whoop!" cried Barney, drawing rein instantly. "Hould on will yez, ye baste av a mule or sure it is carryin' av me to me funeral ye will be doin'. Phwat's the matter wid ye, Mister Man?"

"Up with them 'ar hands!" was the stern demand, "or you'll never live ter find out what's ther matter. You is wanted, that's all ther matter now, an' right hyar is what calls yer. Now keep 'em up or I'll plug yer one fer luck."

Taken by surprise, Barney had obeyed, and now evinced further willingness by standing up in the stirrups and extending his hands upward as high as he could possibly reach.

"Begorra, but Oi can't hould dhem no higher," he cried, "not av yez kill me fur it. Sure a surprise it is to me, to be stopped loike this. Av it is a robber ye are, Oi feel sorry fur ye, for divil a poorer stroke av luck could ye have found in a day's walk."

"Hold yer blatherin' tongue, will ye, an' give somebody else a chance ter chip in a word!" cried the man. "You is my prisoner, an' ther best thing you kin do is ter slide down off o' that mule."

"Me a prisoner!" Barney cried, in greatest surprise. "Phwy am Oi a prisoner, Oi would loike to know?"

"You'll find that out all in good time. Keep up yer hands, cr I'll bore ye through."

"Begob but ye naden't get excited about it," Barney declared. "Oi have no intinition av doin' anyt'ing else at prisint. But Oi do want to be knowin' phwy Oi am a prisoner, an' phwat ye intind doin' wid me."

"You'll find all that out in about a minute, when ther boss comes. He has been on ther look fer ye at ther other branch. I'll jest call his 'tentation this way, an' then you'll find out what's ther matter an' what ain't. Don't yer move, or—"

"O'il not breathe, av ye say so," Barney assured.

The man raised one of his weapons a little higher, and fired a single shot.

"Whoop!" cried Barney, with pretended fear. "Don't be doin' av that same again, mister. Sure ye have no idea how gratin' on me nerves it is."

"It'll be a-gratin' on somethin' wuss'n yer narves, if yer tries on any funny biz till ther boss comes," the man warned. "Keep them hands up, an' up high, too, or I'll try one straight at yer."

"Is it layin' hould upon the moon ye would have me be doin'?" Barney demanded, innocently. "Sure Oi am reachin' as far as ever Oi can widout dislocatin' the neck av me."

"An' I don't want yer to do that, you bet! We wants ter do that same ourselves, when ther proper time comes. Ther boss will settle with yer."

"Begorra, but Oi don't belave ye know phwat ye are doin'. Who do ye take me to be, onyhow?"

"Take yer ter be jest who ye is, an' that's Barney O'Linn, lackey to Dandy Dick Darrel."

At this Barney gave a start he could not help.

It was noticed by the man on foot, and he laughed roughly, exclaiming:

"Yer see I hit ther mark ther fu'st shot, me gallus galoot. What has yer got ter say to it?"

"Oi don't deny that is me name," responded Barney, "but it is puzzled Oi am to be guessin' who you can be. Who are ye, onyhow?"

"Who ain't? Well, I don't mind tellin' ye, seein' that I have got ther drop on ye so fine, an' ther boss are a-comin'. I'm Handy Henry, one of Devil Duval's best game chickens."

Barney O'Linn gave another start, and his face paled a little.

"An' it is that same Devil Duval that is comin' in now?" he asked.

"No; but it is his Right Bower, a personal friend o' yours, I believe. He's ther Devil's lieutenant."

There was every reason for Barney O'Linn to feel alarm now, for he was in a bad situation, and he knew it.

"Well, begorra," Barney observed, "Oi seem to be in fur it, but it is no longer wid thst same Dick Darrel Oi am; so av ye hope to be gettin' at him, ye are a long ways off the track."

"That is a lie, straight," the man contradicted. "You needn't try to lie out of it, me fine feller. We has got yer dead ter rights. If Dick

Dandy Dick Decoyed.

Darrel isn't a prisoner himself by this time, you kin call me a hoss-thief."

"If that is the case, then phwat do ye be wantin' wid me?" Barney asked.

"Is yer head so thick that yer can't grip on ter what's told ye? It's ther Right Bower as wants you."

Steps were heard approaching, and in a few minutes another man appeared upon the scene.

At sight of him, Barney O'Linn's breathing was quickened, and all the "fight" in his nature rose to the surface.

Face to face with one who had terribly wronged him, yet powerless to make an effort to avenge his wrongs! He was a prisoner and helpless.

"Well, my fine buck," this Right Bower of Darrel greeted him, "we have got you in a trap this time, I take it. This is the third hook-up we have had, and the third time never fails, you know, Irisher."

"The curse av Heaven upon yer head, Owen Maron!" Barney fiercely cried. "Give me a fair chance, an' Oi'll foight wid ye here an' now. Let me but dismount an' get me knife in me fist, an' ye may come for me. That is all Oi ask av ye, ye detestable villain!"

"Keep up yer paws!" sung out Handy Henry. He had come nearer, and his weapons enforced his order.

"No, we'll have none of that," spoke Maron. He, too, covered the prisoner with revolvers. "You and your master must hang, and we'll risk nothin', now, so make him secure, Handy," and both men laid hold upon him. In a few minutes he was helplessly bound and secured to the back of his mule. His captors then brought forth their horses, and he was led away down the canyon.

CHAPTER V.

MYSTERIOUS WARNING.

FROM another direction, on this same afternoon a woman was approaching the wild camp of Satan's Delight.

She was well mounted, her animal being a big, spirited bay; was roughly but serviceably clad, and rode upon a side-saddle, one neatly booted foot appearing from under her skirt.

A jaunty sombrero adorned her shapely head, gauntlet gloves were upon her small, firm hands, and a Mexican jacket, short, scant, yet prettily ornamented, added beauty to the graceful symmetry of her supple form. Otherwise her attire was of a serviceable, dark-gray flannel.

Her age was uncertain. It might have been guessed at anywhere between twenty and thirty. She was dark—very dark, and at first sight the idea conveyed that she was Spanish. She was armed, a brace of small, but efficient revolvers appearing in the belt that circled her waist. A hand-bag hung suspended at her left side. In short, she looked like a fearless traveler, independent, and quite able to care for herself.

Any one watching her closely, however, would have discovered that she was getting more and more nervous the further she proceeded; until finally she brought her horse to a stop.

"I can't go another step!" she exclaimed, and peered ahead through the dismal way. Then she looked behind her in the direction she had come.

Her head was inclined, as if to catch the faintest sound, while a hand touched one of the weapons in her belt.

For some moments she remained thus on the alert, when she started forward once more; but ere she had proceeded a dozen rods she stopped again, this time with firm decision, and turned her horse's head in the opposite direction.

"No; not another step!" she cried, looking in the direction she had been going. "I know not what it is, but I do know there is danger there."

She started upon the back trail, at a walk at first, but presently urging her animal to a canter. Some unseen—some inexplicable influence controlled her.

"I never before felt as I do now," she told herself. "What it is I cannot imagine. It has grown upon me since I entered this awful canyon, and I could not shake it off."

She urged the horse to even a faster gait. Now her one thought seemed to be to get out of the canyon as quickly as possible.

"What is it that has come over me?" she questioned. "Am I foolishly afraid, or was there really some danger ahead for me? I cannot believe that I am so cowardly, and it must be that some unseen danger threatened. Whatever it was, my plans are now upset. I shall be obliged to camp out to-night, but I do not mind that half so much as the disappointment—They will not know what has become of me! I ought to go on—I must go on!"

Stopping immediately, she looked back, her resolve almost changed.

One look down into that dismal depth was enough, and with face a shade more pale than heretofore, she continued her retreat.

"No, no!" she exclaimed. "I would not go back in that direction for the world! Whatever it is, danger is lurking there, and I have narrowly escaped it I know. On, good boy, on!" to her horse. "Let us get out of this dreadful place as soon as we can. Perhaps we have escaped death, you and I, old fellow!"

With no further thought of stopping, she hurried forward, and a ride of a quarter of an hour brought her out of the canyon into a pleasant little valley.

Now the sun was getting low in the west, and other perplexities began to assail this fair, lone traveler. That she was a stranger there was evident, and knew nothing of her surroundings.

When she had proceeded into the valley for a distance, she stopped.

"There is only one thing for me to do," she meditated. "I must find a good spot, at a safe distance from the trail, and camp for the night. I shall have to fast, but my horse will have plenty to eat. In the morning we will go on again, old fellow, and perhaps by that time the danger will have passed, if there has been any—but I cannot question that, now."

Turning aside from the trail toward an inviting clump of trees, she was soon in their friendly concealment, and there dismounted.

Scarcely had she done so than the sound of approaching hoofs fell upon her hearing, and peering out, she saw coming along the trail toward the canyon a woman.

She was young, handsome, and with a spirited dash about her that made the unseen observer her friend immediately.

Riding sidewise, but without saddle or even folded blanket beneath her, she held her position like a true equestrienne, her long, rich hair floating upon her shoulders like a mantle.

She was roughly but tastefully dressed, and looked like a genuine wild rose of the Western mountains.

"I must stop her!" was the spoken thought of the woman in the clump of trees. "If there was danger for me, there surely is danger for her."

Quickly fastening the bridle to a limb, she ran out, and reached the trail in time to intercept the rider, who drew rein abruptly at sight of her, cheerily demanding:

"Hello! stranger, who are you?"

"A traveler like yourself," was the response.

"You don't seem to be traveling just now."

"True; my horse is under the trees yonder. I heard you coming, and ran out to warn you of your danger."

"My danger!"

The face of the pretty girl paled a little at the word.

She was not more than eighteen years of age, as the woman on foot could now see.

"Yes, your danger. There is danger in that canyon, and for that reason I returned and stopped here, where I intend to camp for the night."

"But what is the danger? Surely there can be no danger, so near the camp as this. Satan's Delight is less than three miles away, and that is where I am going. I am Flora Dunbarge, and my present home is at that place."

"What the danger is, I do not know," the other had to admit, "but I do know that it is there. I was half-way through the canyon, on my way to the camp you mention, when I was so overpowered with a sense of danger that I turned and came back. I hope you will heed my warning and go no further."

Miss Dunbarge laughed merrily.

"You have been frightened at the darkness and the dismal appearance of the place," she declared. "If you were going to the camp, get your horse and come along with me. I will bear you company."

The other shook her head.

"You do not know me," she returned. "I am not easily frightened. It was more than that, I assure you—something which I can neither explain nor understand. I was forced to turn, and here I am. Make of it what you can, but I beg of you to take warning and remain here."

"That is impossible," the younger woman made reply, now seriously. "Were I to remain out after dark, father would be worried about me. I cannot believe that any harm will come to me, and I must go on. I see you are armed, and so am I; I think we could make it interesting for any one who attempted us injury."

"Perhaps; but that does not alter the situa-

tion so far as I am concerned. I am armed, as you say, yet I had not the courage to let go unheeded the warning which came to me so mysteriously. I have warned you, and I can do no more. Pray do not go on—at least for a time."

By this time the young woman was deeply impressed, as her manner proved.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"My name is Inez Monica," was the reply. "I am a Mexican, and am taking a wild trip just for the excitement of it."

"If that is so, and you have such courage as that would demand, I can believe there must be something in the warning you have received. I will stop here with you till the moon rises, if then you will bear me company."

"I will do that," was the ready promise. "That will give ample time for the danger to have passed; if not, together we will face it."

"So be it. I will go with you to the place where you are camping, and there we will wait."

Slipping to the ground, she walked beside the Mexican, leading the horse.

"Your home is at Satan's Delight, you say?"

"Yes; my father, Jackson Dunbarge, is manager of the Gold Drop Mine."

"And you are the pet of the camp, I presume? That is usually the way, I believe, in such cases."

"Ob, I don't know. I suppose it is so, for I do pretty much as I please. My wish is law, with most of the rough characters there."

So they chatted, on their way to the trees, and were scarcely mindful of approaching night, until sounds from the direction of the canyon aroused them; when, listening, they made out that horses were approaching from that direction.

CHAPTER VI.

DARREL OWNS DEFEAT.

"HORSEMEN are coming," spoke the Mexican lady.

"You are right," Miss Dunbarge agreed. "And if they have come through in safety, there certainly can be no danger."

"Unless it was they who were the danger," suggested her companion. "Rest assured that my premonition was not born of idle fear. I had no thought of fear, none whatever."

"We may perhaps be able to decide. Let us steal out to the trail, under cover of this little gully and the bushes, and we can see who they are. Perhaps I may recognize them as friends, and if so, will speak to them. They can not discover us, and it can do no harm, certainly."

"I am with you, heartily. Come on."

The Mexican led the way, and in a few moments they were at a point where they commanded a close view of the trail.

The horsemen could be seen approaching at a distance, and when they drew nearer, in the gathering gloom, the two women received something of a shock at what they discovered. The men were masked!

"What did I tell you?" the Mexican demanded, catching her companion by the arm. "Honest men do not go about with masks over their faces. You see I had good reason for my fears."

"Yes, indeed!" assented the other. "They must be robbers. I had no idea that such characters were around. It will not be well for them if my father gets after them, I can assure you. But, they are talking; let's catch what they say, if we can."

The men's voices could now be heard. There were two of the fellows.

"Yas," one was heard to say, "ther durn critter hev gi'n us ther slip, sure enough. We couldn't help it if she didn't come erlong, could we?"

"Wull, no, in course not," agreed the other, "but ther boss will be madder'n a hornet about it, you bet."

"Can't help it if he are. If ther durn shemale didn't come our way, how was we ter git holt on her?"

"But ther boss may think we hev played him crooked in ther game."

"We'll have ter chance that 'ar, anyhow."

And that was the last the listeners were able to catch of the conversation, as the men had now passed.

"Was I not right?" demanded the Mexican woman.

"Yes, indeed!" her excited companion echoed.

"But, whom did they mean?"

"I cannot guess, unless yourself. We know from what we have heard that they were in the canyon waiting to capture some girl."

"Perhaps it was you?"

"Impossible. They can have had no knowl-

edge of my coming. Besides, I am a stranger here, while you are well known, and they were undoubtedly aware of your movements."

"But, I cannot see who can wish me harm. And I have heard of no outlaws or such in the neighborhood. Anyhow, we are the better off for not meeting them, and now let us hasten on to the camp without further delay."

"I am ready. That feeling of danger has left me, and I am myself again. We will get our horses and set off without a moment's delay. I am glad that I was ahead of you on the trail, and that the premonition came to me in time to be of service to you."

They had left their place of concealment, and were returning to where their horses had been left.

"I can not believe it was I they wanted to get hold of," the younger again remarked. "It must have been you. The warning came to you."

"Well, I do not know, but it looks impossible. No one can have known of my coming, as I said. Nor can I see why any one would want to make a captive of me. Besides, the men spoke of a girl."

"There is little in that; women here are all 'girls,' to rough-speaking men, as you must know. Here are our horses."

In a few moments they were out upon the trail, continuing on their way.

"Did you recognize either of the fellows?" the Mexican presently asked.

"No; how could I?" was the response.

"By their voices, perhaps."

"No; I did not."

Their conversation ran on, with scarcely a break, until their destination was reached in safety.

Inez Monica had managed to learn a good deal about the camp and its denizens, and although she had talked fully as much as her companion, had let out but little concerning herself.

In the mean time the two masked men had gone on their way, arriving at the end of their trail about the same time the ladies reached the camp.

And their destination was—the outlaw rendezvous.

Just before reaching there they fell in with two others of their gang, with a prisoner.

These were the pair who had Barney O'Linn in charge.

"Hello!" they greeted, "whar's yer gal?"

"We didn't get her," was the reply.

"Didn't get her! How was that? What's up? Too many for ye?"

"No; but she didn't come. Didn't see a sign of her nowhar. She must 'a' went some other way."

"That's durn funny, after it was all planned which way she was ter go. Don't see inter that. How about it, Irishman?"

"Av Oi knowed phwat ye are talkin' about," responded Barney, "Oi moight know phwat ye are talkin' about; as it is, Oi'll be hanged av Oi do."

"An' that's an Irishman's answer, every time," cried the questioner. "You know well enough what I'm talkin' about. We mean that woman what was with you and your boss."

"An' haven't Oi tould ye that Oi am out wid Dick Darrel, an' know nothin' about him an' the woman any more? Av ye can't bel'ave me, Oi can't help that."

"Cuss yer lyin' tongue! Yer is afraid we is after some facts from you. Jest you wait a few minutes more, an' you'll most probably see somethin' that will make ye open yer eyes."

Barney was determined to know nothing, and meant to hold out to the end and stick to the story he had first told.

In a short time all entered the cavern.

Immediately the eyes of the young Irishman and those of the rough-looking man who had been brought in before, met.

"What did I tell yer?" cried Handy Henry. "Thar's yer master, as yer calls him, an' hyer is you. Thar'll be a double funeral, you bet!"

"Where's the captain?" asked Maron, of the man on guard at the opening of the cavern.

"Here I am," was answered, and the chief of the outlaws came out.

"Here's the Irishman," Maron announced, "but the gal didn't appear, so the boys report."

"What? Didn't you get hold of the woman?" Morgan cried, in anger.

"Nary," was the response. "She didn't come our way, an' nothin' was seen of her nowhar."

"That's singular. But, no matter, since we got the two we wanted most. Barney, let me introduce you to your worthy master, Mr. Dandy Richard Prince Darrel!"

He waved his hand toward the hard-looking individual.

"That me masther!" cried Barney, in tone of greatest disgust.

"It will do you no good to play off," warned the outlaw. "It is all up with both of you."

"Yes, it's all up, Barney, and no use kicking," spoke the other prisoner; it being Dandy Dick, sure enough, as Morgan had insisted.

Dick had had little to say till now, wanting to study the matter, to see whether his identity really was known or not. Reflection had shown him that there was no doubt about it.

Nor was there. Devil Duval had had a spy upon him, as he had declared, and had kept himself posted as to his movements. His plans and intentions were known to the consummate villain, and when Dick made the first move of a carefully planned scheme, a trap was in waiting for him and his confederates.

"Well, av that is the case, an' ye says ye are me masther, av coorse Oi'll have to take yer wurred fur it," Barney rejoined. "It is the devil av a bad fix ye appear to be in, so ye do."

"A bad fix we are both in, Barney. I see no hope for us, but we can at least die like men. As for you, Craig Morgan, you have overreached me, as you said; but the end is not yet, even though you take my life, remember that."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the hardened villain. "I suppose you hint at some future day of reckoning. I know nothing about anything of that sort. The present is enough for me to take care of. You have found that you were no match for me. In the morning at sunrise you hang, both of you, so prepare yourselves for that fate. Men, see to it that they do not escape."

CHAPTER VII.

SATAN'S DELIGHT SHOCKED.

SATAN'S DELIGHT was a roaring wild camp. Yet it was held under reasonable restraint by the iron grip of Jackson Dunbarge.

This man was manager of the Gold Drop Mine, and the Gold Drop was the life of the camp. The mine was a stock concern, run on a big scale, and a paying institution to the shareholders.

Jackson Dunbarge himself had a goodly sum invested, and he was the right man in the right place, as he had long ago proved in more ways than one. He was fifty years of age, tall and broad, and with the strength of a giant. With bold, clear-cut features, keen gray eyes, and a close-cropped, iron-gray beard, his presence was such as to command respect and attention always.

He lived with his family at the camp, in a substantial house near the mine, and was really the czar of the valley. But he was a man of strict justice, and his sway was as much due to the regard the people of the camp had for him, as to his prowess and decision of character. Every difference was brought to him for settlement, and his decision was law, every time. There was no appeal to any higher tribunal, for there was none higher.

The camp was a place of perhaps sixty abodes of one sort and another, and had a population of about three hundred. Of this number a reasonable proportion was made up of women and children.

There was a school in the place, a church that waxed and waned with spasmodic irregularity, and half a dozen saloons. Besides these, there was a hotel, the pride of the camp.

This hostelry was a roomy, two-story building, and was called the Mountain Mansion. It was now owned by the mining company, and had been recently opened.

The proprietor or manager was one Richmond Danewood.

Satan's Delight was, nevertheless, a wild, rough camp. Its name was indicative of what it had been, and, as though its character had not sufficiently improved to warrant a change of name, that rugged appellation still clung to it.

A creek ran through the middle of the valley, dividing the camp in half, and this creek was now in the center of the one broad thoroughfare. A rude bridge crossed it in the center of the camp.

As the creek was broad, sluggish, and scarcely more than a foot deep in any spot in the valley, this bridge was little used save by the women and children, or by men when it happened to be in line of their direction. With water-tight boots, the men found the creek no obstacle when they had business on the other side of the camp, and horsemen, of course, never made use of the structure.

The bottom of this creek had been washed—or panned—over and over again, and to that its broad, shallow and even bed was now due. Gold had been discovered in its bottom by a party of prospectors, and finding that panning paid, they had settled right down to the business of securing the "dust."

Working like beavers all day, at night the majority of these fellows would drink and gamble, and their doings finally brought upon their camp the name that still held good.

To this place, about the hour of sunset on the day that witnessed the events already narrated, attention is now invited.

Work was done, of course; supper had been disposed of and the denizens of the camp were free.

Many were out on the street, on either side of the creek, and the saloon and gaming places were preparing for the business of the evening. The camp still followed the example of the first proprietors in this respect.

Nothing of an exciting nature was to be seen or heard, and nothing of that sort was looked for, yet an excitement of the greatest magnitude was pending. Soon the camp was to be in a furor. And the cause of it all was even now drifting slowly down the creek toward the bridge.

In front of the "Come Over Here" Saloon, perhaps the leading drinking resort of the camp, a group of men stood idly talking. In the door was Rusty Leary, the proprietor of the "shebang," idly listening while he waited for business.

It was a little too early for trade. That did not commence until it was getting dark without and he had made his place attractive with lights within.

This was the most pleasant hour of the whole day, and even the dullest mind could not fail to recognize its influence.

Rusty Leary was facing the creek, and was the first to catch sight of an object that came slowly along with the sluggish current.

"Thunder!" he suddenly ejaculated, "what ar' that thing, boyees?"

Eyes immediately followed the direction indicated, and other exclamations at once followed.

"Dorn me if it don't look like er coffin!" cried one Hard-pan Smith.

"An' that's jest what it are, too!" another declared.

"Come erlong," shouted yet another, "an' we'll soon find out what it are."

All save Rusty Leary stepped out toward the bridge, at a lively gait, where the object must soon stop.

When they reached the bridge the thing was near enough for them to see plainly that it was a coffin, and in it was the form of a woman!

"He howlin' coyotes!" exclaimed Hard-pan Smith.

"What in blazes does it mean?" cried one of his companions.

"I give it up!" Smith declared. "It are too much fer me ter guess. He howlin' coyotes! It's enough to skar' a feller, I swow it are!"

It was a plain pine coffin, and the woman it contained was clad all in white, as though in bridal array, and was young and pretty.

The coffin drifted nearer, finally struck the bridge and swung around sidewise against it, and was still.

For several moments the men on the bridge were too horrified to speak.

Presently Hard-pan Smith recovered, and throwing back his head his capacious mouth flew open, and he bellowed:

"Hyar! Feller-citerzens! Hyarl Hyar! Come, ye p'izen galoots, carry yer rotten carcasses down hyar an' see ther latest arrival! Come, everybody! Come, men, women an' kids!"

Such shouting immediately arrested attention, and men ran toward the bridge from every direction. Others followed the lead, and in a few minutes the creek was lined with people on both sides, all eager to learn what it meant.

And a sight of the coffin filled them with more curiosity than ever, as would naturally be supposed. Hundreds of questions, but all bearing upon the one point, were asked at once.

"Hyar it is," declared Hard-pan Smith, "an' yer all knows jest ez much about it as we does. Whar it kem from, who ther gal-critter be, an' sich, we simply don't know; that's all."

After some minutes of this excitement, the coffin was taken out of the water and carried up to the hotel steps, where it was deposited, while the crowd surged and struggled—almost fought around it for a sight of the dead face.

This confusion lasted for some minutes, until an authoritative voice demanded:

"What's the meaning of all this row?"

It was Jackson Dunbarge.

The crowd fell back to make way for him, and he pushed through to the front.

"Great heavens!" he cried, when his sight fell upon the coffin and its beautiful occupant. "What means this?"

"That's what we all wants ter know," answered Hard-pan Smith. "Ther thing kem driftin' down ther creek, an' we fished it out an' hyar it be. It's ther durndest mystery I ever see; be howlin' coyotes if it ain't!"

"And it is one that must be explained," the mine manager cried. "Here is a something that cannot be allowed to pass unnoticed—heavens, no! Let me see, how far has it been possible for it to drift down the creek? Certainly not beyond the Crow Falls."

"An' that's a good score o' miles away," declared one. "It ain't likely it have been put in t'other side o' Hardscrable Diggins."

"You are right. It is hardly probable that it would come through that camp without being seen. That's a dozen miles away, however."

"Ten to one it hev been put afloat at Cheyenne Crossin'," was suggested.

"I agree with you," Dunbarge declared. "That is seven miles away, and the creek is as smooth as glass all the way here. That's the spot, and you may depend on it as the fact. But, who put it in? Who is this dead girl? What crime is back of it? Men, this camp must settle these questions."

At that moment a groan was heard, and a man staggered forward and fell full length across the open coffin, in a dead swoon.

"Thunderation!" cried the mine manager, "it is McDonald! He has recognized the body, sure! When he comes to we shall learn something about the girl. Lift him, and lay him out here on the boards."

CHAPTER VIII.

EXCITEMENT UNSURPASSED.

HAPWOOD McDONALD was a young man of twenty-eight. He was tall, well-formed, and not at all bad-looking. He had come to Satan's Delight some weeks prior to the time of this event, and had asked for work at the Gold Drop Mine. Dunbarge, impressed with his appearance, and having need of a man, offered him the place of time-keeper, and the offer was readily taken.

The young man took hold immediately and soon proved his worth. He was steady and attended strictly to business, and Dunbarge had come to think well of him. He had told little about himself up to this time, except that he was from Cheyenne. He had had some experience at mining, was an excellent penman and bookkeeper, and educated.

Making friends rapidly, he was well-liked by everybody at the camp. He was a boarder at the new hotel, but of late had been spending some of his evenings at the manager's home, it being considered that the manager's daughter was the attraction.

He was quickly taken up from where he had fallen, and laid on the floor of the piazza, while willing hands lent aid toward bringing him out of his faint.

If possible, the excitement was greater than ever, now. Everybody wanted to be near enough to hear what the young man would say when he revived. The whole population of the camp seemed to be on hand, waiting now in almost breathless suspense.

Ere long the swoon passed, and for some seconds after opening his eyes, McDonald stared about him in a confused way, as though unable to collect his thoughts.

Suddenly it came to him, and with a bound he was upon his feet. Dunbarge's ready hand steadied him. He seemed dizzy and weak, at first.

"What was it?" he asked. "What was it, Mr. Dunbarge? Was it a dream? What happened to me? It can't be true that I saw her in a coffin—My God! No, no! Tell me it was a dream—"

It was no use. It had all come back to him again, and the crowd was proof that he had not been dreaming. His eyes sought the coffin, and, as his gaze fell upon it his voice failed him.

Thrusting aside the men around him, he dropped upon his knees beside the coffin, raining kisses upon the dead face of the beautiful girl, at the same time weeping like a child.

The rough crowd was struck to respectful, pitying silence.

Some moments passed, and the mine manager

laid his hand upon the stricken young man's shoulder.

"There, there, McDonald," he spoke kindly, "don't take on so. Brace up and tell us who this young woman was, and we must strive to solve the mystery."

The young man partly raised himself, but it was not to explain anything—at least not yet. Lifting his hand toward heaven, he cried in choking voice:

"Hear me, ye heavens! The man who has done me this wrong shall die, if I am spared to hunt him down! I swear it!"

He rose to his feet then, forcing himself to calmness enough to enable him to speak.

"Who has wronged you?" Dunbarge had already asked.

"Who but my hated rival!" was the fierce reply. "He was capable of such work as this, and he only."

"And this young woman?"

"Is she who was to have been my bride. She who—"

Voice failed him, and he bent his head, gazing at the fair form in the coffin at his feet.

Suddenly, with a cry, he bent down and took something from a hand of the dead—something which no one else had yet observed.

It was a folded piece of paper, and as he spread it out, writing was seen on one side of it. This he read, a great sob breaking from his breast as he ended, followed instantly by a vengeful imprecation.

"What is on the paper?" asked Dunbarge.

"Read it and know," was the answer, as McDonald gave it into his hand.

"Give it to us out erloud!" was the demand. "Yas! Let's hear it! Read er out, boss! Out loud!"

Dunbarge complied, after a brief glance at the wording of the missive. The note was brief, and read as follows:

"BELOVED McDONALD:—

"Here is your darling Myra. She would not be mine in life, and as I have no use for her in death, you are welcome to her. Happening to know where you are, I send her to you, hoping that you will appreciate my good will."

There was no signature.

"Oh! Ther intarnal skunk!"

"Ther wuss than Apache hyena!"

"He desarves bein' burnt at the stake!"

A hundred cries such as these rent the evening air.

"Who is this inhuman flend—this worse than devil?" demanded Dunbarge.

"His name is Steelforth—if that is his name," answered McDonald; "Wardman Steelforth, as he calls himself."

"And where does he belong? Come, tell us your story, and if he is guilty, as you think, this camp, to a man, will help you in hunting him down."

A loud shout of approval greeted that promise. Had Wardman Steelforth appeared there at the moment, he would probably have been severely dealt with, for the crowd was wild.

"My simple story is soon told," spoke McDonald. "This dead girl was the only child of a widow who lives at a camp not many miles from Cheyenne. Her name was Myra Pratley. I was employed at that place, fell in love with the young lady, and she promised to marry me. But about that time Steelforth put in his appearance."

"Ther wolf!"

"Through him I lost my place at the mine. Through him I was accused, falsely, of robbery, and had to leave the camp. Through him the mind of this dead girl's mother was poisoned against me, and she forbade Myra ever to speak to me again. Steelforth seemed rich, wormed his way into the widow's graces, and I was an outcast all around—all around save in the affections of this poor girl. She was true to me to the end. I can be sure of that."

His choking voice made him pause.

"I hung around the camp for several days, never daring to be seen," he resumed, "having occasional stolen interviews with Myra. Finally I was detected, and had to fly for my life, so bitter was the feeling which that villain had aroused against me. But I had the sacred promise of her I loved that she would remain steadfastly true to me. She believed in me, if no one else did, and promised to come to me whenever I had found a situation and was able to send for her."

Again he was obliged to stop, his words being hardly intelligible.

"I was looking forward to that happy day," he went on. "After next pay, Mr. Dunbarge, I intended telling you my story, and if you believed me and trusted me, then I was going to

send for Myra to come to me here. But, now, my hope is dead—dead—"

He could proceed no further, and with another great cry, fell upon the coffin, kissing the dead face again and again.

"This is something terrible," declared Dunbarge, thoroughly shocked. "The note proves the manner of man this Steelforth must be. Men of Satan's Delight, it is for us to investigate, and if we find that what McDonald says is all true, and I for one do not doubt it, then this fiend ought to be burned alive, almost."

Shouts of approval greeted what he said, and suggestions, questions and comments flew thick and fast.

Night was coming on, by this time, but it was needed not. Nothing could draw attention away from the center of interest—the body of the dead girl and the one lone mourner.

The minutes were passing, and presently, Dunbarge, turning away from those with whom he had been exchanging some words, was about to speak to McDonald again, when at that instant an almost scream came from the young man's lips.

"She lives! She lives!"

Such was the cry he uttered, and catching the fair form out of the coffin, he rose with it in his arms.

"Are you sure of that?" inquired Dunbarge, greatly excited. "You must be mistaken—"

"No! No! There is no mistake about it!" was the glad cry. "I saw her eyes move! Make room, and let me carry her into the house!"

The bar-room was nearest, and the door being open, McDonald carried the body in there, the crowd readily making way for him, and Dunbarge was close behind.

Light was quickly had, and when the body had been laid on a table at the rear end of the room, McDonald, Dunbarge and others bent over it, to watch for further proof of what McDonald had asserted.

Presently that proof was given. There was a fluttering of the eyelids, the lips parted, and Myra Pratley was alive! The rough handling her lover had given her, in his eager haste to get her out of the coffin, had undoubtedly hastened her resuscitation.

CHAPTER IX.

SOMETHING SURPRISING.

WHEN Craig Morgan, or "Devil Duval," turned away, after giving orders to his men to see to it that Dandy Dick and Barney O'Linn did not escape, for turn away he did as soon as the words were uttered, Darrel called after him:

"If escape we do, Craig Morgan, it will be bad for you. It is war to the death between you and me, and your only way to insure your safety is to kill me while you have me in your power. But we do not despair. You escaped from us twice when escape looked impossible, and we may get away from you now."

"Ha, ha, ha!" was the taunting laugh. "Escape if you can! You have no silly woman to aid you, as I had. Ha, ha, ha! I am a ladies' man, Dick Darrel. I have a winning way about me, you know. Why, even your wife was never so happy as when in my loving embrace—Ha, ha, ha, ha! Oh, you may tug at your bonds, but it is no use; you can't get away or get at me."

Again rung out his cruel, hateful laugh, and he disappeared.

Dandy Dick had exerted every effort to burst his bonds, but without avail. He was too well secured.

Could he have got at the throat of his enemy then and there, nothing but death would have ended his grip.

It was indeed war to the death between these two. The wrongs Dick Darrel had suffered at the hands of this inhuman wretch were too great for anything but death to settle.

Dick ceased his struggles with a sigh.

"If not now, thank God there is a hereafter," he murmured.

"That same there is, sor," echoed Barney, "an' divil an escape is there from it, aythur, begob."

The men around laughed and jeered at them tauntingly.

"If there is such a thing," cried the "Right Bower," "you will find out all about it first, anyhow. You have heard the verdict."

"Yis; an' would that Oi could get me two hands at the t'roat av ye this minute," cried Barney. "Av Oi wouldn't choke the vile loife-out av ye, begorra but Oi'm a shame to the mother that bore me, so Oi am!"

"Words are idle, now, Barney," spoke Dick. "We have done our best, but have lost."

"Roight ye are," Barney agreed; "but it is devil a tip av white they'll found on me feathers."

Maron had given orders for a piece of rope to be brought. He took it and with the aid of the others bound Dick and Barney together, back to back. Then they were left lying on the hard floor, all the men going away save the one who remained on guard at the cavern mouth.

"Mister Darrel," spoke Barney, "it is a devil av a fix we are in, sure."

"We are in a bad fix indeed," Dick agreed.

"An' there seems no way out av it."

"I'm afraid we're done for."

"An' it's too bad."

"I agree with you there. But, if die we must, it will be in the cause of vengeance."

"Yis, Oi know; but devil a poor satisfaction that will be, when we feel the rope about our necks, knowin' that we didn't get our revenge out av the rascals."

They were speaking in low tones, scarcely more than whispers, and the man on guard offered no objections to their talking. It could do no harm how much they talked, since they could not possibly escape.

"But how in the name av the O'ld Bhoy did they ever get away wid you?" Barney presently asked.

"Well you may ask," responded Dick. "I would hardly believe it, if it were not for the fact that I am here a prisoner in proof of it."

He told Barney all about what had happened, and how neatly he had been decoyed into the trap. It was all plain enough now, and it proved again the diabolical cunning of the human devil against whom they were fighting.

"The Jezebel!" Barney cried, when Dick had done. "Is it the same wan that saved the murtherin' villain on the other occasions?"

"No, it is not she, but another!" explained Dick. "It is one even worse than the other. Why, her acting was perfect! I had no suspicion of the trap—how could I have?—until I was in it."

"Well, there is wan t'ing to be proud of, anyhow."

"And what is that? I fail to see it in our situation, Barney."

"It is in the fact that the lady escaped them, that's phwat."

"Hal right you are. And I wonder what has become of her? I do not see how they missed her, when it is clear that their spy learned all our plans."

"Nor Oi aythur, begob. But it is plain that they didn't get her, and so she must be at the camp an' out av all danger by this time. Would to all the good saints that it was ourselves along wid her."

"I wish we were, Barney."

And so they talked on and on, with no thought of sleep, and scarcely thought for anything else but escape and revenge.

Escape, however, seemed out of the question. They had been working faithfully all this time, trying to make a beginning toward the loosening of their bonds, but it was altogether useless.

Time dragged by, and all was still within the cavern. Nothing was to be heard save the footsteps of the man on guard, when he occasionally paced forward and back across the opening.

It must have been near midnight, and Dick and Barney were still talking, when a man came forward from the rear of the cavern, where other chambers evidently branched off.

The man proved to be Devil Duval.

"Still here, are you?" he cried, giving Dick a kick with his foot, and he turned to the man on guard.

"Your life will pay for it if these men escape," he declared.

"Never fear for that," was the answer.

"I'm warning you. If you get sleepy, and think you are likely to doze, call another man immediately. Call even me, if necessary."

"All right; but I'm good fer ther balance of my trick, I guess. In another hour I'll be off duty anyhow, yer know."

"And see to it that you pass my word along to Handy when he comes to relieve you. It will be death, mind you, if these fellows get out of your hands."

With that the chief retired, and all was still again.

This part of the cavern had long been in darkness now. The torch that had lighted it had burned out, and had not been replaced.

Dick and Barney had resumed their talk, and were still conferring when they felt firm hands grasp their arms, and a low voice hissed, in words no more than barely audible:

"Not a move, not a word, not a sound more

than you have been making. Go on with your whispering talk, or pretend to, anyhow, and leave me to my work. I am here to save you if I can."

It was a woman's voice, and Dandy Dick thought he recognized it at first, but could not be sure.

Need it be said that it was a welcome sound to him and Barney?

Heeding the warning, and following the directions given, the two prisoners continued their whispering, and while they did so they felt a keen knife at work at their bonds.

Several of the cords had been cut, when, suddenly, the work was suspended.

"I am too hasty," the woman spoke, in lowest whisper, to Dick. "Before I set you free I must exact a promise from you."

"And what is it?" Dick asked. "You may be sure we are ready to agree to almost any terms, in the fix you find us in here."

"Well, it is this: That you will go away, if you find it possible to get out after I have set you free, without attempting the life of Craig Morgan."

"I will do it," Dick promptly promised. "Set us free, and we will not attempt injury to any one here this night. But, woman, who are you? I have heard your voice before, I am sure."

"Yes, you have. I am Pearl Mayne, the woman who twice saved Craig Morgan from your hated power, once at Burnt Match and again at Paradise Pocket."

"We must have our weapons first, and they are near at hand."

"No, no! You must leave your weapons here. I will not allow you to arm yourselves, for that might mean death to the man I love—"

"Your objection comes too late," interrupted Dick. "We must have our weapons, but my pledge to you holds good. We will get away unseen if it is possible. And now tell me what has brought you here?"

"Well, I am powerless to demand terms now, seeing that I have done all I can for you. But pray use care, for your discovery would be death, perhaps, for me. And there is one request I must ask. That is, that you will never reveal who set you free."

"Very well, we promise that, too. And now tell us about yourself. A minute more or less will make little difference. The guard can have no suspicion that anything is wrong."

"You know, without asking, what has brought me here," the woman answered. "I am determined that Craig Morgan shall keep faith with me. He has made me what I am, and he shall keep his promise."

"He will never do what he has promised," declared Dick. "He is rotten to the core. You have heard the story of the wrongs he did me. I can not understand how you can help loathing him. Better will it be for you to go away and forget him, for your life will assuredly pay the penalty if you persist in putting yourself in his way."

"What! Do you imagine he would kill me, after all I have done for him?"

"I do," answered Dick. "There is not the faintest spark of honor in his vile heart. He is utterly heartless, scoundrous!"

"Oh! I can never believe that. But I do not fear him. He shall keep his word, or—die!"

And the woman spoke fiercely.

"When I helped him to escape from you the last time, he promised to meet me at Denver as soon as possible, and there marry me and go with me far away from this part of the country. I went there and waited, but he did not come. I set out again in search of him. I am determined in the matter, you see. I thought possibly he did not dare come to Denver, but now I believe that he was false again, and—But, your time is precious!"

"One question more," urged Dick, talking yet as though to Barney, "and then we will try to get away. Why have you done us this favor? That is something that is not easily understood. It is doing something that is likely to work ill to the villain you so foolishly love."

"Why have I helped you? It is to repay the favors you have done for me, and to prove that I am grateful for the mercy you showed me at Paradise Pocket. Now, go at once. Waste not a moment. I will keep up this whispering, doing my best to imitate you and your man. Go."

"All right," assented Darrel, "we will make the effort as soon as I have got our weapons, if that is possible. You and Barney keep up this talking, so that no suspicion will be awakened."

With that Dick moved carefully away in the direction of the spot where he had seen the weapons thrown in a heap on the floor near the rocky wall.

"An' don't be afther lavin' av me musketoon behind," whispered Barney.

Dick moved with all caution possible, and presently his hand came into contact with the weapons, where they had been left. Lifting them with extreme care, he put his own in his belt, and with Barney's in hand, crept back again.

So far so good. And now it would be death to him who opposed their escape.

"Are you not going with us?" Dick asked of the woman.

"No; my business is here," was the answer. "Go—go at once."

"Yes; we go at once. Here, Barney, are your weapons. Careful, now. You must handle that big gun with care, or you will make a noise with it."

"Trust me for that same, sor," was the answer. "Begorra, but Oi feel loike a man again, now, wid me gun in me hands. Lead on, Misster Darrel!"

Silently, cautiously they moved away, leaving the woman who had done them so great a service talking or mumbling to herself, to deceive the ears of the man on guard.

Barely had they started, though, when the voice of the sentry challenged them.

They gripped their weapons firmly, and Dick quickly responded.

"How much longer is yer goin' ter keep up that durn chinnin'?" was the demand.

"We will stop it at once, if you say so," an-

"No; we will not go yet," declared Dick.

Dandy Dick Decoyed.

sawed Dick, promptly. "It is the only consolation we have, since sleep is out of the question."

"Waal, I wish yer would, fer I'm durn sick of yer buzzin'," the man returned. "I reckons yer kin go ter sleep, if yer keeps yer jaws still long enough ter give it a try."

"All right," replied Dick; "you won't hear any more out of us."

"Oim shut up loike a clam," added Barney.

The woman took the cue and was silent now, and the watchman paced to and fro across the opening a few times, while Dick and Barney crept silently away in the darkness.

Lucky it had been for them, but more lucky for the watchman, just then, that the challenge had come no later.

Crossing the cavern in safety, the two pressed themselves as close to the ground and the wall as possible, and paused a moment.

Everything was all right, thus far, and after a few seconds Dick crept forward again.

This time he drew as near to the open as he thought prudent, and waited.

The watchman was on the other side, standing still.

Presently he started to pace across the mouth of the cavern again, his footfalls ringing out with even, steady sound.

Reaching the south side, he paused a moment, and then started back again. The moment he turned, Darrel crept forward toward the open air.

Fortune favored him. He made his way out without having made a sound that could reach the hearing of the man on guard, and crept away along the wall to the right, as the woman had directed.

Hearing the steps of the sentry again, immediately returning, Dick trembled for the safety of his ally, and his weapons sprung to hand. But, no alarm was made, and he concluded that Barney must have held back a little.

Such was the case, and when the guardsman turned again the young Irishman followed his master's example, and like him, got out in safety. When they had proceeded to the ledge and had let themselves carefully over, they hastened away along the trail with all speed consistent with safety.

CHAPTER XI.

MURDER IN THE CAVERN.

THE guardsman, all unsuspecting of what had happened, continued his vigil with faithful watchfulness, and half an hour passed.

Then other steps were heard further back in the cavern, coming toward the opening, and presently another man joined him. It was the fellow called Handy Henry, come to relieve him.

"I reckons yer is about ready ter go ter roost, ain't yer?" he made inquiry, as he came up.

"Wull, yas, but I ain't very sleepy, either. A feller couldn't 'a' got ter sleep anyhow, even if he'd wanted to, fer a fact."

"What was ter bander him?"

"Ther way ther two prisoners hev been chinnin' all along. I shut 'em up only a little while ago, hows'ever, an' hain't heard a peep out of 'em sence. Guess they is asleep now."

"We'll look an' see, an' see if they're all right, afore you go. In course they is, but I want ter be sure afore I begin my watch. Yer can't find no fault with that, I know. Whar's yer matches?"

"That's all right, Handy. Yer is welcome ter look at ther purty birds an' satersfy yerself they is all thar. Hyar's yer match, an' right hyar's ther eend of a torch. Light'er up, an' we'll take a sly squint at ther sleepin' beauties, if they is asleep."

"An' I reckon they is, seein' how still they be."

"Is yer asleep thar, noose-baits?"

There was no response.

"I reckons they is, fast enough," remarked Handy, as he lighted the old torch. "They's awful still."

"Durn me if they ain't quiet, an' that's ther fact," averred the watchman, as he listened to catch their breathing. "Hurry up with ther light!"

Too impatient to wait, now that a thought of suspicious fear had entered his mind, the fellow went forward, feeling for the prisoners with his foot. They were not to be found, and an ejaculation escaped him.

"Durnation!" he cried, "whar is they? Hurry with that light, Handy, fer ther luv ov goodness! I can't feel ther cusses nowhar."

The torch was now burning, and with it Handy Henry stepped quickly forward to

where his comrade awaited him, and where a startling discovery awaited them both.

"Gone!" cried the guardsman, his face turning ghastly pale, and perspiration breaking out upon his forehead. "How in the name of all hev they done it? Thar ain't been a sound, Handy, not a sound of ary sort."

"I give it up, bat gone they is, sure 'nuff," was the response Handy made, his own face startlingly pale. "An', see!" he cried. "They has had help! Somebody hev been in hyer an' cut ther cords that held 'em. Ther devil help you when ther cap'n calls yer to 'count."

Handy Henry had caught up the ropes with which the prisoners had been secured, and examination showed that they had been severed with a keen knife.

"Ther doose is ter pay byer," he declared, "an' we'd best wake ther cap'n up an' tell him. It won't make it no easier fer you ter hold it back, an' sides, it was none o' my doin's, an' I'm not goin' ter be blamed fur it. Hello! Hello!"

So he sung out, loudly, waking the echoes in the cavern, and bringing shouts and a hasty scramble of steps from away back in the rear.

"What's ther matter?" demanded the voice of the Right Bower, as he came running out.

"Ther prisoners has got away, that's what's ther matter," answered Handy.

The Right Bower increased his speed and was immediately with them. And others were coming.

"Where are they? How did they get out?" he demanded. "Speak up, cuss yer!" to the trembling watchman. "Tell what yer knows about this hyar business."

"I—I don't know nothin' about it," the poor wretch could only gasp. "I have been right hyar all ther time, haven't shet me eyes onces, an' haven't heerd ther least sound."

"You're a liar, you are!" was the cry. "You hev been asleep, and somebody has got in and done this business. Thar's no other way, no other way er tall! When ther captain comes thar will be music, you bet!"

All the others were now on hand, all save Morgan himself.

The unhappy watchman was striving to defend himself, saying over and over he had not been asleep, but he was not believed.

Every man present was against him. It was impossible, they all agreed, that any one could have got in without his knowing it, had he been awake. It was either that, or he was a traitor.

But, where was the captain of these rascals?

That was now asked, as he was tardy in making his appearance, and all shouted for him—all save the trembling guardsman.

They were about to start in search of him, when his voice was heard in response, answering their call. And, immediately after, a great cry came from him.

It was a cry of commingled horror and alarm, if the rascal was capable of either emotion, and was immediately followed by the wildest imprecations.

"What in tarnation kin be up?" one of the men demanded.

"Something unusual, be sure of that," said the Right Bower. "Mebby he's got ther prisoners thar. Come on!"

Morgan's ravings grew louder and by the time the men reached the rear of the cavern he sprung out from his private apartment in the miserable hole, confronting them.

"Have you got ther cusses?" asked the Bower.

"Have I got what—who—what are you talking about?" the chief thundered.

"Why, the prisoners. They has got away. There have—"

"Got away? How did they get away? But, that tells the story. This is the work of Dick Darrel! Curse him! Curse him!"

"What is the work of Dick Darrel?" was asked. "What hev he done? Tell us ther hull of it!"

"But, this escape," Devil Duval interrupted. "How was it accomplished? How did they get free? By heaven! the man who was on guard at that time, dies!"

"Somebody cut the cords that held 'em," explained Maron. "Somebody got in, that's sure, but this man swears hard that he wasn't asleep a minute, an' didn't hear a bit of noise."

"He lies! Curse him, he lies!" cried the chief. "Do you mean to say you don't know anything about this?"

"No more'n you do," was the answer. "I swear ter you, cap'n, that I hadn't shut me eyes onces, an' didn't feel a bit sleepy. 'Sides, I beed 'em talkin' only a little while afore Handy kem!"

Without a word of warning the outlaw flash-

ed forth a revolver and shot the man in his tracks!

"Take that, liar!" he cried, as the man dropped.

The others about him paled, and drew back from him, all save the Bower.

"Served him right," he declared coolly. "But, cap'n, what has happened here? What was you shoutin' about?"

"Look and see!" was the ycr.

With a jerk, Devil Duval tore down the curtain that shut off his private retreat, and snatching the torch from the hand of Handy Henry, flared its light upon the scene within.

There, on a rude bed on the floor, lay the body of the woman who had been instrumental in bringing about the capture of Dandy Dick. She was disrobed, only partly covered by the bedclothes, and her breast was covered with blood!

"Murdered!" cried the Right Bower.

"Yes," echoed Devil Duval, "murdered—stabbed to the heart!"

"Oh! ther mean, cowardly dog!" exclaimed Handy Henry. "He deserves ter have his heart cut out alive!"

"A worse fate than that will be his!" shouted the enraged chief. "He has struck me a blow that nothing but his life can satisfy. Adele Wolfe was the best and truest woman I ever had for a friend."

"But is yer sure it was him?" asked Handy Henry. "How is it he didn't kill you, too?"

"Of course 'twas him!" Morgan asseverated. "Who else could it be? And the reason he didn't kill me, he wants to meet me in fight. Curse him! I'll give him that chance, if ever we meet again."

The excitement ran high, and the outlaw chief was beside himself in his rage.

Rushing out to the spot where the prisoners had been, it was made clear that some one had helped them to escape. Who had it been? Was it the guard who had turned traitor—No; or he would have gone with them. It was plain that he had been asleep.

"A thousand curses!" Devil Duval cried, suddenly. "I have it now!"

"What is it?" demanded the Right Bower.

"Who helped 'em to git away?"

"It was the woman we failed to capture, that's who it was. Curse her! She must have followed some of you here."

"That's it, sure as you live," agreed Maron. "She's ther one that done it! A pity we didn't get her too, and we'd been sure of 'em all. Never mind; the day of reckoning will come."

CHAPTER XII.

MCDONALD'S HOPE DASHED.

THE hotel at Satan's Delight, the Mountain Mansion, laid claim to high respectability. It had been leased with the express understanding, that it was to be kept on a strictly first-class plan.

When completed, a card in the Denver papers had brought applications for the house, one from a Mr. Richmond Danewood among the number. This gentleman was from Kentucky, according to his own statement, and had had considerable experience in the hotel line.

As he had come in person, and his manner and address were pleasing, he had little trouble in securing the property for a year. He seemed to have plenty of money, and, in a little time, the house was thrown open to the public. And now the claim it laid to being respectable seemed supported by the facts.

Mr. Danewood was, as stated, pleasing in manner and address. He appeared to be about forty years of age, and was certainly no older. His manner of dress was markedly Southern, as was his appearance, as a whole. He wore mustache' and imperial of about the proper style, and the broad hat peculiar to the country he claimed to hail from.

His accent and manner of speech, too, were unmistakably Southern. There was no doubt about his being what he claimed. His house had the air of his native clime to a certain extent, and if further proof were wanting, it was provided for in the quality of his whisky, of which he was an acknowledged good judge. His manager, clerk and assistant, Mr. Walton Turgee, declared there was none better.

As Mr. Danewood was absent considerable of the time, the management of the house rested more upon Mr. Turgee. He was from the same section of country as Mr. Danewood, and was similar in general character and temperament in many respects. He was a younger man, by some years. Mr. Danewood had business interests also at Cheyenne, and traveled horseback between that place and the camp. He was frequently away for days at a time.

He was absent now, on this occasion of the great excitement over the finding of the coffin in the creek.

When the body had been taken into the hotel bar-room, Mr. Turgee had at once made the request for good order. But no one had any intention of creating disorder.

The crowd pressed around the table upon which the body of the fair young girl lay, Turgee among the rest, eager for the proof of what McDonald had asserted.

And now, that proof being established in the manner shown, the excitement was great, and the crowd pressed until there was for a moment danger that the table would be overturned.

Jackson Dunbarge let his voice be heard, ordering room to be made to the door that opened into the hall, and further directing Turgee to lead the way into the parlor opposite. This order being promptly obeyed, the manager and McDonald lifted the young woman and carried her out.

A few followed into the parlor, but the great crowd was barred, and here everything was comparatively quiet.

The girl was laid on a lounge, and McDonald knelt beside her, supporting her head.

To this time the girl's gaze had been wild and unsteady, as though her reason had not yet come back. Now, however, she fixed her eyes upon McDonald's face.

"Hapwood!" she presently articulated.

"Myra!" the young man excitedly responded, and he pressed her to him, imprinting a kiss on her lips.

"Where am I?" she asked, looking around at the others. "What has happened to me? How came I here?"

"Be careful how you answer," cautioned Mr. Dunbarge. "Perhaps she does not know the truth. Let's hear what she can tell first."

"Who is that gentleman?" the girl inquired in low tone. "What does he mean? What can he know about me? I never saw him before. Tell me where I am, Hapwood."

"You are with me at Satan's Delight, the camp where I am employed," the young man explained. "You need not leave me any more, Myra, for I am among friends here, and friends who will be your friends too."

"But how came I here?" she persisted. "How was—"

She stopped abruptly, with a great cry, and struggled out of her lover's embrace.

"What is it? What is the matter, Myra?"

So McDonald asked, as he let her go, a strange fear coming upon him.

"Now I remember!" the girl cried. "I am his wife! They made me marry him! Mother forced me into it, Hapwood."

With a groan McDonald sprung to his feet, his hands clasping his head, and for some seconds he stood looking down at the woman he loved. With another almost groan, he turned and paced the floor.

It was all too plain. The bridal robe was enough—ought to have been enough, without anything more. Myra, the girl for whom he would have given his life, was the wife of another, and that other was—his hated enemy! It was almost too much for him to bear.

The poor girl, now seeming to remember it all, was weeping.

The others were silent, awaiting further developments, which they knew must soon come.

Suddenly McDonald thought of the note he had found in the girl's band. Instantly he stopped short, snatching it from his pocket.

"It is impossible!" he cried. "I cannot believe it! Here is a note from the knave, in which he says you would not marry him, Myra. Tell me it is not so. Tell me it is a mistake."

It will be remembered that the note did not distinctly make that assertion.

"No, no; it is no mistake," the girl sobbed. "I refused; I told them I would not do it; but they forced me. I even threatened to kill myself, but it was of no use, for they made me marry him. Oh! I wish I was dead!"

McDonald groaned again. There seemed no room to doubt further.

"Yes, it is true, true," the girl insisted. "See, Hapgood, my dress proves it! See my hated bridal dress! Our happiness is impossible now, for I am bound forever to the man I hate. But, you have not told me how I came here. Where is he? Where is my mother? Who brought me to this place?"

Strength of reason returning, she was puzzled over these points. It was plain that there was much she did not know. Did she know anything about the coffin? How was it to be made known to her? McDonald was certainly at loss how to answer her.

"Are you not aware that you have been asleep?" asked Mr. Dunbarge.

"I suppose I must have been," was the response. "Was I brought here asleep? That seems odd."

"Yes; you were brought here asleep," Dunbarge affirmed. "You have been as though dead, and perhaps for some time. Do you know what day it is?"

"I suppose it is Saturday. The marriage—the hated, hated marriage—took place last night at my home. Oh! why did I not kill myself, as I threatened? Why did I ever let it go on? Forgive me, Hapwood; forgive, forgive me!"

Dunbarge turned to McDonald.

"There is something mighty strange about this business," he remarked. "This is a Tuesday night."

"You are right; it's strange," the young man assented. "I do not understand it, I cannot understand it. But, it is only too plain that my happiness is ruined."

"You say this is a Tuesday!" cried the young woman. "Where have I been all the time? You have not told me how I came here! Have you not seen Wardman Steelforth, my husband—Oh! what have I done—what have I done!"

Again did she cover her face with her hands and sob aloud.

"No; we have not seen the villain," replied McDonald. "Shall we tell her how she came here, Mr. Dunbarge?"

"Yes; I think she is able to stand it now, and it may bring something back to her mind. I will tell her for you, if you want me to."

The girl looked from one to the other in utter bewilderment.

"You came here in a coffin, young lady," the manager went right on. "That coffin was found early this evening, floating down the creek. How you came in it, and where it came from, is all a mystery to us. Can you throw any light upon it?"

The girl's face was a picture of amazement profound. Her eyes were wildly staring, and her lips were half-parted with horror.

"Good heavens!" she gasped. "What is this you tell me? It cannot be true. Hapwood, tell me, is it true?"

"Yes, Myra—Mrs. Steelforth!—it is true. You were found just as Mr. Dunbarge has described. Do you remember anything about it? By your own words it seems you have been unconscious since some time Saturday night."

"I know nothing about it," the girl declared. "But, I am faint, and hungry—so hungry!"

Reaction was beginning, and she sunk back half-exhausted, while Dunbarge ordered brandy and egg to be prepared and given to her at once in moderate quantity. And while this was being done Mrs. Dunbarge, the manager's wife, entered hastily and in excitement to announce that their daughter was still out of the camp.

CHAPTER XIII.

STRANGE SEARCH.

JACKSON DUNBARGE immediately took alarm. "Flora has not yet returned, do you say?" he cried, his face troubled.

"No; she has not yet come back from her ride," his wife declared. "I am terribly alarmed about her."

"And no wonder," the mine manager spoke. "I must send out at once and see if she can be found. Something has happened to keep her out until this hour."

"Oh, do you think any harm has come to her, Jackson? She must not be allowed to go out of the camp alone, any more. Hurry, and get men out in search of her without a minute's delay."

"No; I don't think any serious harm has come to her," Dunbarge assured. "She is armed and quite able to take care of herself. It may be that her horse had sprained a joint, or something of that sort. Go home, and I'll see to it at once."

But, just then the thud of hoofs was heard without, and horses stopped before the house.

"This may be she," Dunbarge remarked. "We'll see."

He hastened out, closely followed by his wife and others, and, much to their relief, found it was their daughter.

But with her was another woman, a Mexican, evidently, and a stranger. They had ridden close to the piazza, and at sight of her father Flora exclaimed:

"Here I am, pa, safe and sound. I see you were getting alarmed about me, for your face tells me that; and yours the more, ma. And I might have run into danger, had it not been for this lady."

"What manner of danger?" Dunbarge demanded.

"Outlaws," was the startling reply. "I came near running into the arms of two men wearing masks."

"Is it possible that we have outlaws here in this section?" the manager ejaculated. "This must be looked into. It must be nipped right in the bud, if it is so."

"And it is certainly true, sir," spoke up the Mexican lady. "We heard enough of their talk to assure us of that. Both your daughter and myself narrowly escaped the fellows. And that is not the worst of it, either."

"Not the worst of it!"

"Indeed, no!" cried Flora. "From what they said, we know they had been waiting in the canyon to entrap one or the other of us."

"And it must certainly have been your daughter, sir," assured Inez Monica. "They could have no knowledge of my coming here, none whatever. And there is no reason why they would want to make a prisoner of me."

"Well, my daughter says she was saved from running into danger by you, and you have our sincere thanks. Tell us all about your adventure, Flora."

It was soon told.

"This is more than strange," the czar of the camp thoughtfully remarked.

"And you positively must not ride out alone any more," put in Mrs. Dunbarge to her daughter.

"He howlin' coyotes!" cried Hard-pan Smith. "It never rains but it is bound ter pour, an' it hits me that this is only ther beginnin' of trouble. If that's outlaws around, then we has got ter look out fer 'em."

"And we will, too," declared Dunbarge, grimly. "We'll have no such work as has been going on over in the other section lately. We'll nip it in the bud, as I said just now. But, Flora, go on to the house, and your friend with you. Mrs. Dunbarge will make you welcome, Miss Monica."

"I thank you, sir," was the response, "but I cannot accept. I must stop at the hotel as was my intention."

The point was disputed, but finding it useless to urge further, Dunbarge assisted her to dismount and introduced Turgee, and taking leave of Miss Dunbarge, the Mexican lady entered the hotel, a man taking charge of her horse.

Miss Dunbarge and her mother turned in the direction of home, and for the time being that excitement was over.

A little time after Inez Monica had registered, and had been shown her room, she appeared on the piazza.

There she paced up and down, very leisurely, for quite a time, looking eagerly and inquiringly at every one who came within sight. She seemed to be expecting some particular person, and her air of disappointment increased.

Finally she walked far enough to look into the bar-room.

Stopping at a window, the nearest, which was without blind or curtain, she looked in at the crowd, taking plenty of time to make a thorough search of every face.

She drew away, that done, more disappointed than ever, and her face wore a worried, troubled expression. Clear enough it was, now, that there was some individual she was in quest of, for good or evil.

"It is strange, strange," she muttered, as she turned away.

This time she walked to the extreme end of the piazza in the other direction. She had been keeping near the entrance.

Reaching the end, she saw something there that gave her nerves a shock. It was the coffin in which Myra Pratley had come so mysteriously to the camp a few hours before.

Of course, she had heard nearly all about that by this time, hearing the conversation of men in groups here and there, and knew that this must be the coffin they had mentioned; still it gave her a start—seemed an ill omen—perhaps a harbinger of death.

With a shudder she turned away, and retraced her steps to the other end of the long piazza.

As she was passing the door, Walton Turgee stepped out.

"Pardon me," he said politely, "but can I be of service to you in any way?"

"No; I think not," was the easy response. "I am merely walking the piazza a little, enjoying the evening air."

"I have noticed you," the proprietor's handy man confessed, "and as you seemed to be looking for some one, thought I would speak to you. Beg your pardon for doing so, madam."

"I am much obliged to you," was the re-

sponse, "and if I need your services I shall not hesitate to call on you. I believe I will now retire."

With a bow, then, she turned to the hall door and disappeared from sight.

Turgee looked after her, and shook his head.

"That'll do for a blind," he muttered, "but it don't fit my eye. That woman is looking for somebody, that's plain."

With hands behind him he walked on to the end where the coffin rested, and there stopped, looking at the thing with much curiosity.

"Yes; and here's more mystery," he mused. "This is one of the strangest bits of doings that ever came up in my way. Wonder what Dane-wood will think about it when he returns?"

When he had stood for some minutes, he pushed the coffin off with his foot and returned the way he had come, entering the bar-room.

Mr. Dunbarge and the young man McDonald were there in earnest conversation.

The young woman of the coffin had been taken to a room, and was being cared for by the women of the house.

Nothing further had been learned from her. It was plain that she knew nothing whatever that could throw light upon the mystery of her coming there in so wonderfully strange a manner.

After a little while a young stranger entered the bar-room.

He was a dark fellow, with a slender mustache, rather small in stature, and with easy, graceful movements.

Speaking to no one, he made the circuit of the room idly, seeming to pay but little attention to any one, and after a few minutes went out again.

"Who was that?" asked Dunbarge.

"Never saw him before," answered McDonald.

The local czar put the same question to Turgee, but the reply was similar.

No one knew the young man, and after a few minutes he was forgotten, having been set down as a new arrival.

On leaving the hotel, that individual had gone direct to the Come Over Here, the popular saloon of which mention has been made. Entering there, he had made the same circuit as at the hotel.

He spoke to no one, minded his own business strictly, and gave no one opportunity to address him. Finally his search there was over, if it was a search, and he went out. And from there he passed to other places of similar kind, proving now that he was certainly in quest of some one.

In that manner he made the entire circuit of the camp, both sides of the creek, entering every public place, but to no purpose. At last he gave up, and with an air of annoyance and not a little of anxiety, turned his steps in the direction of the hotel again.

There he entered the hall quietly, and in a moment more had passed into the room of the Mexican lady, Inez Monica.

CHAPTER XIV.

PECULIAR DISAPPEARANCE.

NEXT morning found Satan's Delight about as usual. The excitement of the night before had subsided, and men set about their work as if nothing out of common had happened.

To be sure the mystery of the coffin was talked about, and every man asked his neighbor how the young woman fared, and whether she could tell any more than she had told the night before. This question answered, there was nothing more to enlist their interest.

The report as given out was that the young woman was better, but too weak to leave her bed, and that she had been unable to tell anything more. What she had asserted already, she still maintained, but could add nothing to it. She was positive as to the fact of her marriage, much to the unhappiness of the young man McDonald.

At an early hour Dunbarge started a messenger to the camp the young woman was from, to inquire into the case.

This was with McDonald's knowledge, and he had been eager to accompany the man, in disguise; but as his life, perhaps, would be in danger there, Dunbarge would not allow him to go.

Dunbarge had the utmost confidence in him. McDonald's own character and conduct, since his coming to the camp, spoke highly for him, and now the proof of his assertion that Steelforth was a chief of knaves added still more in his favor. He was believed to be both innocent and honest.

The Mexican woman arose early, and was out on the street immediately after breakfast. She appeared to be idly sauntering around, viewing

the camp, but a close observer might have been sure that she was scanning every face.

And a close observer there was, in the person of Turgee. He had an eye upon her, watching her whenever he could, and now and again he would shake his head in a knowing way.

What he knew, however, amounted to nothing, and what he discovered amounted to little more.

Along in the forenoon Danewood rode into the camp, returning from a trip to Cheyenne. He had stopped over night at a camp twenty miles or so from the Delight.

He showed interest in the story of the coffin, and in the other reports that were given him as soon as he arrived. He seemed particularly interested in the assertion that there were outlaws around.

It was about at the time of his return, too, when another individual entered the valley.

This personage was one of the usual mining camp sort, with nothing whatever to draw attention to him. He looked like an Irishman, and perhaps was.

Wearing a rough red beard, and clad in work-a-day attire, he loitered around like a miner out of work, paying little attention to any one, and nobody paying much to him.

Nevertheless he had his eyes about him, and presently, when the Mexican lady was far down the valley in one of her strolls, he sauntered in that direction, finally meeting her face to face as she turned to come back.

Just as they met, and were passing, the man deftly dropped a letter at her feet, going right on without a look at her.

She saw it, could not help seeing it, and stooping, picked it up.

As she did this, she glanced back at the man who had let it drop, but he was going right on his way.

And he continued going, too. No stop did he make, but passed out of the valley by way of one of the three canyons that opened into it.

The woman smiled, as she glanced after him once more before opening the letter.

"A clever fellow," she said to herself. "I had no idea it was he, so well disguised he was. But, my letter! I must see what it has to say."

The letter was addressed to her, and tearing it open, she made haste to get at what it contained, and as she read her face grew pale.

"Heavens!" she cried, when she ended, "it was a narrow escape! And now the work has to be done all over again. Well, I will prove that I am equal to the emergency, anyhow."

Straight to the hotel she went, and to her room.

That was the last seen of Inez Monica. She was not on hand for dinner, and a woman going to her room, found that she was gone, with all her belongings!

It was considered a strange disappearance, and the more so, since her horse was yet in the stable, and no one had seen her since some time in the morning. Where she had gone was a puzzle.

In the morning she had met Flora Dunbarge, and had promised to call on her in the afternoon.

Not doing so, that young lady wondered at it, and at tea spoke to her father. He had heard of the disappearance, and was trying to explain it in some way satisfactorily to himself.

As soon as Flora heard of it, she cried:

"It has been the outlaws! She was the one they were after, and they have been successful in carrying her off!"

Dunbarge had been asking himself if this could be the case.

"It may be as you say, my child," he decided, "but I do not see how it was possible for them to get her away, in broad daylight, without her having a chance to give some alarm."

"But you will look into it, won't you? If she is in the hands of such fellows, she must be rescued."

"And she shall be, too, if anything can be discovered of their whereabouts. I will take a force of men and hunt them out. I will have no band of outlaws within a hundred miles of this camp, if I can help it. And, as for harboring them here—Well, let one come here and try it, that's all."

This was good enough, as far as it went, but it did not explain the mystery of the woman's disappearance, and Miss Dunbarge was still troubled.

Nothing else new or exciting took place after this disappearance.

There were strangers in camp, true, but strangers frequently were there, so little was to be made of that.

This was stage-day, as the great day at all such camps is called—the day when the regular stage brings news from the wide world without; and immediately after supper the citizens collected in front of the hotel.

The stage was on time, for a wonder—as some expressed it, for it was oftener quite a little late; and came rolling down the street, on the hotel side of the creek, at its usual lively gait. Finally the driver let out his "Whoa!" and drew rein, clapped on the break, and the "hearse" was there.

"Hyar we is again!" cried the driver, throwing down his lines and pitching out the mail.

"An' yer seems ter have a load, too," was the shout in response, from some one in the assembled throng.

"Bet yer life I has! An' hyar's a specimen of John Bull. What d'yer think of him fer a British dude? Ain't he a daisy, wi' no flaws in him?"

As he indicated an English tourist who was just alighting from the inside, the remarks he made were greeted with laughter. The man was certainly a specimen of his kind—a perfect specimen.

He had the red face, the flaming mutton-chop whiskers, and the inseparable eyeglass. He was covered in a long, plaid duster, with a cap to match. At his side hung his field-glass in its case. On his left arm was a light shawl. He was a British dude superfine.

Immediately after came his valet, clad in buttons—principally buttons, and brass buttons, too. He was loaded down with bags and coats, canes and umbrellas, and what not.

His face smooth and red, was that of an English flunkie, ready at his master's beck and call.

These two made straight for the hotel, master ahead and servant behind.

The other passengers were of about the usual assortment.

"Yas; them's a fine pair," a man in the crowd made answer to the driver's remarks. "Whad ye pick 'em up?"

"Over at Cheyenne Junction, don' cher know," the driver drawled. "Don't see how ther queen kin spare 'em, do you? Should think she'd be afeerd ter let 'em go 'way from home."

So the joking ran, for the minute; but the Englishman and his man paid no attention to it.

Straight into the bar-room of the Mountain Mansion they marched, and straight to the desk, where the master stopped and turned.

The flunkie had stopped immediately behind him, standing like a statue, and when the master had further burdened him with his shawl he turned to the desk.

"Aw, can you give us a room, me good fel-lah?" he asked, with a drawl.

"Yes; I guess we can fit you out, sir," answered Turgee. "What kind do you want?"

The Britisher explained at length, and his wants being assured as satisfactorily supplied, set about writing his name and that of his man in the register. When he put down the pen Turgee read—"Lord Brandt Comingway, London; with man Jones."

CHAPTER XV.

INTRODUCES BAD-MAN BEN.

LORD BRANDT COMINGWAY, with his man, was the center of all interest. It was the first time Satan's Delight had ever been favored so highly.

As one man remarked,—the camp was "devilish delighted to see 'em." And while the "lord" and his man were at supper, and after the sorting of the mail, a crowd began to collect in the bar-room of the Mansion to see more of them.

While they waited, keeping pretty fair order considering the place they were in—for no disorder was allowed in the Mansion if it could be avoided—while they waited, a terribly rough-looking customer swaggered in. He was dirty, ragged, and a picture of dismal distress generally.

"Waal, I reckons ter opine that ther school are in, by ther size of ther class, I behold," he cried, stopping and staring about him, with arms akimbo. "How d'e do, my hearty hyenas. Glad ter see ye lookin' so mighty well. How's yer sisters and yer cousins and yer aunts, and all ther rest of ther folks? I'm a stranger hyar, as maybe yer kin see."

"Yes, we see you are," Walton Turgee made prompt response, "and seeing that you are a stranger, let me put a flea in your ear. We allow no unruly conduct here, and no loud talking, so please govern yourself accordingly. If you don't, we shall be under the unpleasant necessity of firing you out. I merely mention this to let

you know that you are in a respectable house where no disturbance will be permitted."

The tough-looking stranger put his hat back from his face, straddled his legs and jammed his fists upon his hips again, staring at the speaker in an amazed sort of way.

"Be you done, mister?" he asked, when Turgee had finished.

"Yes; I am done. There's no need to be offended, if you look at it right. I have merely given you the rules of the house."

"Waal, may I be eternally chawed!" the ragged stranger cried. "I calls this hyar durn onkind of yer, I does. It's a purty reception ter give a galoot what comes inter yer cur'nl old shebang fer ther fu'st time—comes in as peaceful as ary kitten, too. You mought 'a' waited till I had begun ter kick up a fuss, an' then gone fer me. Stead o' that, what does yer do but jump onto me with both feet, right off ter wunst. I tells yer it war rough on a feller, an' I leave it to ther gang if it wasn't."

"It is the rule of the house, sir, to give fair and timely warning to such as you," spoke up Richmond Danewood.

"An' who mought you be?" the hard-looking stranger demanded.

"I am proprietor of this house," was the answer.

"That's ther lay of the land, be it? Waal, now, Mister P'prietor an' Mister P'prietor's Pup, jest bearken ter what I has got ter say on ther p'int under consideration, if yer please: My name is Benjamin Bumstock, it are, an' I'm called Bad-man Ben fer short. When it comes ter firing out, what yer speaks of doin', let me warn yer that you'll find me rooted an' braced if yer tries it on, an' that ther chances is the pair of yer will go out fu'st. D'yer hear what I'm stutterin'? Not that I'm goin' ter make any fuss, mind yer, but you warned me an' I warns you. Them's my say-so."

The attention of the crowd was upon the stranger, and his odd remarks brought a laugh, causing Mr. Turgee to turn very red.

"Very well," spoke Danewood; "no need to say any more about it, if you are inclined to be orderly."

He turned immediately to his business at the desk, motioning to Turgee to say no more to the man.

"Yas, that's ther style of a he-boss critter Bad-man Ben are," the terrible specimen observed to the crowd, seeing that there was no further call for his attentions in the direction of the proprietor and his man. "Gentle as a kitten most of ther time, yet I gits right up onto my hind legs and howls when thar is occasion fer it. When I am trod on, then I'm goin' ter show my claws, every time, you bet! They calls me Bad-man, and mighty bad I am, too, in a scrimmage. Why, when I let myself loose yer can't see nothin' but dust around, with now an' then a tuft o' ha'r a-flyin'. An' when ther smoke o' battle clears off a bit, thar I am as unruffled as ary zephyr, while ther bull scene round about looks as if a devastatin' cyclone had been that way."

"You must be somethin' of a terror," remarked Hard-pen Smith.

"Nothin' of ther sort, sir, unless I'm sot on," the stranger declared. "Jest now, when that feller jumped onto me so, I admit that my first row of bristles did sort o' stiffen up in a tighty way, but now all is serene again, an' I'm as harmles as ary leetle kitten. As I remarked at fu'st, I reckons ter opine that ther school are in, ter jedge by the size of ther class. What's ther excitement, boyees? What's on ther carpet fer ther evening? If thar's any fun around, count me in. I'm a reg'lar he-boss fer fun, I am, and don't yer fergit that. Why, I'm ther funniest critter on hind legs, when yer hit me in ther right way, an' I'm rigged out wi'two funny bones ter every j'int in me hull kerkiss— 'Ello! Blarst me heyses, what 'ave we 'ere?"

Stopping short in what he was saying, he ended with that decidedly cockney observation, staring in the direction of the door in the rear.

Lord Brandt Comingway and his man Jones had just entered the room from supper, and at this, stopped and stared at the stranger.

"Bless me soul!" the bummer cried, rushing forward with outstretched hand. "'Ow do 'e do? Hi cawn't begin to bexpres 'ow glad Hi ham to see 'e!'

The Britisher stepped back abashed, almost crowding upon the corns of his buttoned statue immediately behind him, and waving the bummer off with both hands, hurriedly cried out, in half alarm as it seemed.

"Hi beg pawdon, sir, but Hi 'aven't the pleasure of your acquaintance, hand Hi cawn't shake 'ands with you, don't you know."

"Bless yer honest British heart," cried the bummer, grabbing a hand in spite of him and shaking it vigorously, "that don't make no difference, not a bit! I kin greet you like a brother jest the same. How's everything at home? How's Her Jags, the queen? Did she ask after me when yer kem away?"

The Englishman, very red and very much distressed, trying hard to disengage his hand, stammered out:

"Hi— Hi basks to 'ave me 'and, sir! Hi ham binsulted! 'Ow dare you take such liberty with ha gentleman, sir!"

"Lord love yer," cried the hard-looking customer, "don't yer know that this is ther land o' liberty? You is in ther land of ther free and ther home of ther brave, me lud. Ever hear o' Bunker Hill?"

"Y— yes, Hi 'ave 'eard hof hit, sir;" was the response. "Hi believe me countrymen won ha battle there some years ago. Did you never 'ear hof that? But, me 'and sir; me 'and. Leave go hof me 'and, Hi command you!"

"Waal, yas, I believe that was the way of it, come ter think," Bad-man Ben had to acknowledge, "if hist'ry don't lie, an' I don't reckon it do. But, it don't make much difference who got ther battle, so long as we have got ther hill. Thar's yer 'and, me lud, an' I guess you'll find it all in good order yet."

With that, and dropping the Britisher's hand, the hard-looking fellow uttered a coarse laugh.

"Hi demand satisfaction for such ba binsult, sir!" the Englishman now cried, as he fondled his nearly crushed fingers. "Hi demand, landlord, that you punish this binsolent fellah for the liberty 'e 'as taken with me."

Both Danewood and Turgee were now on hand, with dark looks for the tramp. The chances seemed to be that he would be run out with a rush.

"Hold on, now, hold on!" Mr. Bad-man cried, waving them back. "I don't want no row, gentlemen, an' if yer makes one it will be yer own fault. Only a little innocent fun, yer know, what won't harm nobody. Don't yer tetch me, or thar will be a ragin' cyclone let loose in hyar what yer will wish yer had never stirre' up."

"But we can't have anything of this sort going on!" argued Danewood. "His Lordship is a guest of the house, you see, and we must see to it that he is not molested. Now you must leave him alone and say no more to him, that's all, so mind it."

"But, durn it, he demands satisfaction," cried Bad-man. "What am I goin' ter do about that? Did you ever hear of John Bull's demandin' satisfaction of a Yankee an' not gettin' it? I opines ter reckon not. How will yer have it, me lud? Hyar I be, all ready fer business, yer see."

"Jones!" and the British dude turned suddenly to His Buttons. "Hi want you to take this rude fellah by the nose for me."

Jones made a seeming effort to turn pale, and his eyes flew open to their widest extent. His knees smote together, and his jaw dropped. Did his master really want him to commit suicide in this way?

"But, m'lord," he gasped. "Hi— Hi—"

"Didn't you 'ear what Hi said?" the Britisher snapped.

Bad-man Ben was laughing ready to kill himself at such a proposition.

The flunky stepped forward, timidly, and actually reached for the bummer's nose, but with his eyes shut and with his left arm up to protect his face from an expected cuff.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Bad-man. "Is this hyar ther way yo' take yer satisfaction, me lud? Why, you little runt, if 'ou was ter pull my nose," to the flunky. "I'd jest most everlastin'ly snatch you out o' them 'ar buttons, an' don't ye fergit it."

Even that did not deter the flunky from the attempt. "His Lordship" had ordered, and it must be done if he got killed for it.

Seeing that he really meant it, Bad-man Ben reached out, caught hold of the fellow in buttons, and the next instant had stood him on his head. And, not only so, but applied his hand vigorously upon that portion of his person where a schoolmaster usually applies the birch to unruly pupils.

CHAPTER XVI.

NOTING NEW ARRIVALS.

It was all done so quickly that no one had time to interfere, seemingly. But no one had a thought of interfering, save the proprietor and manager of the hotel.

"Thar ye are, me lud!" cried Bad-man, as he let his victim drop. "If that don't satisfy yer, say ther word an' I'll try ther same on you."

That leetle exercise sort o' sets me blood in motion."

"You'll try nothing more of the sort here, sir," sternly declared Danewood. "At him, Turgee, and we'll pitch him out, neck and heels! Such a scene is a disgrace to our house. We'll have no more of it, my scarecrow. Out you go!"

The bummer backed away and tried to protest, declaring that he would reduce the whole shebang to matchwood if they interfered with him, but that did not stay their hands. They laid hold upon him, both together, and ran him to the door and out.

"We'll show you that you can't do as you please here, you rascal!" cried the proprietor, giving him a parting kick. "If you come back here again we'll give you something that you will remember. We'll show you that this is no place for ruffianly rows, such as you seemed determined to bring about. Now git!"

After all his boasting, the fellow had not made much of a show of resistance. He allowed himself to be run out without great effort, and when he went off the piazza, he took a header into the dust and dirt of the street.

"That's what I call durn rough on a stranger," he complained, as he gathered himself up and looked back woefully. "What did yer do it fer, anyhow? Can't a feller have a leetle fun in this hyar camp. 'Thout somebody has got ter spile it fer him? You kin thank yer star of good luck that I ain't mad, or that durn bar-room would 'a' been cleaned out so quick it would 'a' made yer beads swim, an' that's what I'm tellin' yo. Give my partin' love to ther Britisher, anyhow, an' tell him ter 'member me to ther queen, if he gets home alive."

See that you don't come in here again, that's all," was the angry retort. And with it the two started to turn back into the house.

As they turned, something caught their attention and caused them to stop and look again. A queer looking customer, whether man or woman, was approaching from up the valley.

It was a person mounted upon a small burro, peculiar and outlandish in manner of dress, together with about as much of a load as the animal was able to navigate under and keep to the trail. It was a unique spectacle.

"What in the name of the moon can that be?" cried Danewood.

"I give it up," responded Turgee. "It looks like a wandering Jew—or Jewess, for I'll be hanged if I can tell whether it's man or woman."

"No, nor I."

Turgee hastened into the house, to look after things, while Danewood remained on the piazza gazing at the approaching mystery.

It was quite likely that Turgee said something when he entered, about the approach of the queer-looking traveler, for the crowd hastened out, those who hadn't already done so.

Even Bad-man Ben forgot all about the taking down he had received, and gazed at the approaching personage wonderingly.

"This hyar takes ther cake, dura me if it don't!" he cried. "Hang me fer a monkey if ther burro ain't ther smallest thing in ther hull outfit."

"I agree with yer thar," cried Hard-pen Smith. "It's a woman, boyees, sure as yer is born. But, what kind fer a critter she are, hang me if I can tell at this range."

"I reckons ter opine that she would look like death on a pale hoss, if ther burro critter war only white," commented Bad-man Ben. "She looks old enough ter be ther mother-in-law of old What's-his-name."

The strange personage was approaching at snail's pace, and by this time the crowd was fired with curiosity.

Everybody came out of the bar-room, even to the Britisher and his man, and Turgee appeared at the d'or.

The woman—for woman it was—came on, and stopped in front of the piazza.

She proved to be a hide-us-looking bag. She was clad in dark garments all patched and darned, yet bedecked with flashy gewgaws. Her skin was very dark, full of lines, and daubed here and there with bright spots of paint on the face.

Packed with her on the burro was what seemed to be a folded tent. Besides that there was a stool, a small three-legged table, and other light articles. It was about as much of a load as the animal was able to bear up under and get along. But the burro is a wonderful beast.

"A Gypsy witch!" exclaimed Richmond Danewood.

"That's what she be, fer a dollar," averred Hard-pen Smith.

Having stopped, she spoke sharply to the

burro, at the same time jogging it violently, and down it went all in a heap.

The crowd laughed at this, but the old hag stepped solemnly up and out of the seeming ruins, and made a bow in the direction of the piazza.

She looked even older than she had seemed at first. Her back was much bent, her form trembled, and her voice, when she spoke, was like the squeak of a cracked pipe in a disabled organ.

"Gentlemen," she said, "I am the famed Madam Sibyl, the greatest fortune-teller the world ever knew, and even yet the world does not half know me. I crave your permission to pitch my tent here in your little camp for awhile, and beg to receive a little patronage from you. For every dollar you give me, you will get ten in return in valuable information—ay, in some cases a hundredfold."

Jackson Dunbarge was approaching from the post-office, and the answer was left for him to make.

"You may do that, certainly," he gave permission. "Put up your tent and make yourself at home. Hey, boys?"

"That's ther idee!" was the cry. "Anything ter break ther mernoterny of ther place. Don't reckon thar's a galoot among us but will have his fortun' took."

"Thank you, gentlemen, thank you!" the old hag piped. "Now if I can engage two men to help me, I shall soon be at home with you. It does not take long for Madam Sibyl to set-up her mansion."

This was followed by a cackle of a laugh, and the crowd set Madam Sibyl down as about the worst-looking specimen of her sex they had ever seen.

Hard-pan Smith and another man offered their services, and a site was selected near the bridge for the tent. There the burro was led, and under the old woman's directions the tent was up before it was quite dark.

When everything was arranged, it looked like a Gypsy camp on the smallest possible scale.

There would have been a run of business immediately, had not the old woman refused to tell fortunes that night. She was tired, she explained, and must rest. On the morrow she would attend to all who might call.

As soon as it was quite dark, a dim light was seen in her tent, the hanging door of which she had closed, and those who ventured to look in declared that the old hag was mixing her spells in human skulls over a spirit lamp that had the shape of a coffin.

In the mean time the English lord and his man had established themselves in their room, and had not been further troubled.

Bad-man Ben was at the Come Over Here, where it was likely that he would find fight if he was looking for anything in that line, and he seemed to be.

The mystery of the coffin was a mystery still, the man sent out by Dunbarge not having returned. In fact, he could not be looked for yet. He had not reached his destination—certainly not any more than that.

The disappearance of the Mexican lady was still the wonder of the day. What had become of her was more than any one could guess, unless it was that the outlaws had succeeded in carrying her off. Dunbarge had sent out several scouts to see if they could discover anything.

The woman of the coffin had by this time recovered much of her strength, but had not yet been allowed to venture out of her room. She had not been able to throw any more light upon the mystery that surrounded her. McDonald, miserable indeed, had not seen her, and seemed to have little desire to do so. If she was the wife of his enemy she could be nothing to him.

Time passed, and the business of the evening was well under way when a new arrival entered the Come Over Here.

It was a timely arrival, too, and a fortunate one, perhaps, for Mr. Bad-man Ben. He had been blowing his horn so loudly that at last one good citizen had offered to "do him up."

They were about getting warmed up to it, and would probably have been at it, tooth and nail, had not the entrance of a stranger taken their thoughts away from their foolish and unreasonable quarrel, so saving perhaps the threatened demolition of the saloon at the hands of Bad-man.

The stranger was a dapper personage, in male attire, but it was readily enough guessed that it was a woman. Indeed, her attire was not intended to hide that fact, for she wore her luxuriant hair hanging loose, with only a ribbon to hold it in partial restraint.

In one hand she carried a square, covered

case—a case of considerable size, but not very heavy. A neat worsted cap sat upon her head with easy and graceful effect, but otherwise her attire was of plain material, of the male pattern. She advanced to the bar at once, and depositing her box on it, addressed Rusty Leary. Every one in the room was eager to learn who and what she was.

CHAPTER XVII.

A REMARKABLE SHAVE ORDERED.

"I TAKE it you are the proprietor of this place, sir," the woman spoke.

"That's about what I be, miss," Rusty Leary responded. "What kin I do fer you? Speak her right out, miss."

"Thank you. Well then, first of all, I want to inquire whether you have a good barber in this camp? This may seem a strange question, but I'll explain."

"A good barber? Bless yer heart, miss, we haven't any barber er tall, good nor bad. Every galoot is his own barber, them as ain't too lazy ter shave, an' I opine them is in ther majority."

"I am glad to hear that. I am a barber, and have my kit along with me in this box. I am called 'Frank, the barber.' Now if you will allow me to open my shop in your saloon, sir, I think it will be a good thing for both of us. What do you say to my proposition?"

"Why, yer is welcome, in course. A woman barber. Waal, by thunder, boyees, that is somethin' new, ain't it! I'll bet my socks that thar won't be a onshaved man in thar hull camp two days from now. Miss, I'll bet yer has struck a payin' streak, an' I hope you'll work it fer all it's worth. Set up yer mill jest as soon as yer want to, an' show us what yer kin do."

"Thank you, sir. I will begin at once, in a temporary way. To morrow I can arrange things to suit me in some out-of-the-way corner, and then I'll get along finely. May I have the use of a chair and table?"

"Yas, help yerself to what yer wants. An' if yer wants any help, any of ther galoots hyar will lend ye a hand."

The woman made her selections among the tables and chairs, and men placed the articles for her.

Putting her box on the table then, she opened it and took out an assortment of razors, cup, comb, brush, etc., etc., and prepared for business.

She was the center of all attention, and Bad-man Ben and his belligerent opposer forgot all about their little difficulty, and were among the quiet lookers-on to see the woman make ready.

Towels and paper came out of the box, then a dainty white cap and apron for herself, and when she had laid off her worsted cap and coat, and had donned these, not a man there but wanted to be the first to place himself under her hands for a shave.

Finally she prepared her lather in the cup, and announced that she was ready to serve her friends to the best of her ability.

"Yas, an' I'm ready ter be served, too," cried Bad-man Ben. "I wants ther first treat at this hyar thing, boyees, an' I reckon none of ye is goin' ter kick. If thar is, do yer kickin' right hyar an' now."

"Anybody first, it make no difference," spoke the woman.

Bad-man was glaring around, to see if anybody was going to challenge him for the honor, and speedily he discovered that somebody was.

The man who had been on the point of going for him as the barber entered, now pushed his way to the fore, and as he came he was pulling up his sleeves and blustering away at a great rate.

"Hyar's what's goin' ter kick, an' kick hard, you bet!" he cried. "Nodurn duffer of a stranger is goin' ter come hyar an' take ther cream off'n our puddin', not if we knows it! I am ther galoot what's goin' ter have ther fu'st whack at this hyar new game, pilgrim."

"Be, be ye?" sneered Bad-man. "I'll show yer about that. Jest gaze at me, an' tell me if I look like a galoot what takes water—"

"Nary a drop o' water do you take, by ther looks of yer!" some one sung out.

"Bet yer life I don't!" cried Bad-man. "I takes no water, nuther by fact nor by figger. An' I takes none this time. I'm goin' ter be shaved fu'st, my p'izen-lookin' coyote, an' don't yer try ter hinder me, nuther."

He made a step toward the chair, but the other fellow stepped in his way and tried to get in himself.

Bad-man laid hold upon him instantly, by the collar and belt, and with a sudden swing, sent

him spinning away toward the bar, where he brought up with a crash.

When he recovered he made a reach for a weapon, but Bad-man had him covered already, with a brace of formidable revolvers, and as he squinted along them at the enraged citizen, he cried:

"Hol' on, thar! Don't yer go fer to do that, or it will be death to yer so sudden that yer won't know but ther lightnin's hit ye. You jest put them 'ar tools away, or you will hear somethin' drop. No foolin', now, you bet."

The other man had the worst of it for the present, and his hand appeared in sight without any weapon in it.

"That's ther stuff," Bad-man remarked. "Now don't ye try any more funny biz, or you'll take a dose o' pills afore ye knows yer needs 'em. I'll keep me pops in hand while yer ther daisy barber are fingerin' me face fer me."

The chair had been placed with its back to a corner, as it happened, and when Bad-man took his seat he was facing the crowd.

His revolvers were in hand, and his hands were to the front, resting upon his legs, and so long as he could keep command of the situation with his eyes he held the best hand.

His opponent grumbled away, but seeing that Bad-man had the chair, did not further contest his right to it, having had a taste of his power of muscle and perhaps considering enough as good as a feast, of that particular sort of thing.

Frank took up a razor and began to whet it deftly upon a strop, asking as she did so:

"A clean shave, sir?"

"That's a p'int that I want ter tell yer about," answered Bad-man.

"Very well, sir, give your directions, and I'll do whatever you say. Shall I block out a pair of siders for you?"

Bad-man Ben's face was covered with a bristly stubble of some weeks' growth, and it looked as though the little barber's first job was going to be a tough one.

"No, no siders fer me, if you please," he made reply. "I'll tell ye what I want ter aim at. It are a new thing ter be shaved by a purty woman, an' I'll be darn if I don't want ter prolong it as long as I kin."

"Going to give me a hard job, eh? It looks as though I shall have that, anyhow."

"No; nor not 'zactly that either. I'll tell yer what I'm gettin' at: I am going ter have it done a leetle at a time, so's I kin come every day in ther week. See what I'm at?"

"Yes; I see," pausing with lather brush in hand.

"Waal, this time you kin begin by takin' out a spot on my chin, a spot about as big as a dollar. Don't cut nowbar else, but jest right thar. Then ter-morrer I'll let ye do ther same on one cheek. Next day ther same on t'other, an' so on. By ther time ye git around to my chin again, it will be in need of another shave."

The absurd proposition was greeted with laughter by everybody.

"And so you will go around like a spotted what-is-it, just for the sake of a shave in one little spot every day, eh?" commented the barber.

"That's my business—not meanin' ter be impertinent to a lady. It's not ther shavin' that I keer a durn about, miss, but it's ter have a good-lookin' gal like yerself playin' with me face."

"Yes, it's your business, that's so, and I'll fix you out in any way you like. I'll cut a railroad clear from one ear to the other, if you say so. It's your own face, and it would be pretty rough if a man couldn't have his face decorated to suit his own taste. Lean back, please."

"All right; but don't get in front of me. I want ter keep one eye peeled on that 'ar critter over thar."

"Oh, he's not going to interfere with you any further, sir."

With that the woman barber set briskly at work, Bad-man laying back under the protection of his weapons, and in a little time the job was done.

When he rose from the chair he was greeted with a howl of derision, and his appearance deserved it. There was the spot on his chin, the only clean spot about him, shining like a bald head by moonlight.

"Ho, ho, ho! If you ain't a darling now!" cried Rusty Leary.

"Should say he was!" echoed Hard-pan Smith. "A buzzard wouldn't 'sociate with yer."

"I'm not askin' fer yer company," was the retort. "As ther little gal said, it ar' my own face an' I kin do as I please with it. I'm only sorry I didn't tell her ter make it smaller, so's I could git shaved oftener."

No sooner was Bad-man out of the chair and his quarter paid, than another customer was in,

and the woman was kept busy well into the night.

She talked a little to every customer who came under her hands, and looked at each face searchingly, but this latter was not noticed. Occasionally, too, she would scan the room closely.

But if in search of any particular person, it was plain that she did not find the one she looked for. She asked no questions, and no one noticed anything of the trifling points mentioned—trifling in all appearances.

Finally, she declared herself tired out, and must stop work, though it was plain that her customers would have held out till morning, had she remained. Perhaps they would have considered it as a great compliment to her to have done so. But that was out of the question.

There was no further excitement that night, and shortly after the lady barber had closed her shop the camp was in slumber.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MADAM SIBYL TESTED.

ANOTHER day dawned. Quiet and order reigned in the little camp.

Bad-man Ben was on hand bright and early for another shave, but the barber was not so early.

She had told Rusty Leary on the previous night that she would not resume her business till afternoon, and he might so announce should any one call.

"Ain't that too durn bad!" exclaimed Bad-man Benjamin. "Hyar I have got up 'arly ter have her gentle fingers play over my face again, ter take out jest a leetle chunk more, an' I was comin' in again this afternoon, too. I'm goin' ter work ther snap twice a day, anyhow, if I have ter set up till midnight ter do it, you bet!"

There was no help for it, so Mr. Bad-man had to bring his stock of patience to bear and seek other pastime while he waited.

"Hyar's jest ther ticket!" he cried when, on leaving the saloon, he caught sight of the fortune-teller's tent near the bridge. "I'll go an' git me fortune took while I wait. Bet yer life I'll come out wi' a gilt-edge diplomer, bound around wi' silk an' satin. Come erlong, any o' you galoots what wants ter hear my record read off straight. Bet yer life thar ain't no flies on it!"

And away he went for the tent of Madam Sibyl.

Some of the loungers about the saloon followed him, to see the fun, if there was to be any.

"Hello, in thar, old witch!" the fellow cried when he came to the tent, and he slapped on the flap with the blade of his bowie. "Time you was up an' 'tendin' ter biz. Hyar's a feller what wants his fortune took right off soon, an' in the latest approved style. Hustle out hyar an' let's hear what yer has got ter say. I want ther cleanest an' whitest record ye ever guv a galoot in yer life. D'y'e hear? Amble out hyar an' show yerself."

The piping voice of the old woman was heard within, saying she would be out in a moment, and presently she emerged.

She was a hideous looking object. Her coarse hair was standing every way, her dark skin looked darker than ever, its lines looked deeper, and with daubs of new paint she was simply a fright.

"It is rather early in the morning, gentlemen," she remarked, "but how can I serve you?"

"I want ter hear me fortune told," cried Ben. "I am jest dyin' ter know what ther future hev got laid by in stock fer yours truly."

"Let me look at your hand," the woman requested.

Bad-man extended his dirty paw willingly enough, and the old hag looked at the palm.

"You told me you wanted a clean and white record, and a future to be proud of," she remarked.

"You hit it prezack," the fellow assured. "I sartainly spoke to them effect on ther p'int. Let 'er slide."

"I will oblige you," the woman went on. "I think that kind of fortune will please you much the better, sir. Now for it. Your hand tells me that you are a remarkably honest man—too honest for your own good, in fact. All your quiet thoughts are of a serious turn. You will eventually become a preacher, will marry a widow of wealth, will live to ripe old age and die happy."

"He, he, haw!" roared Bad-man. "How ar' that fer a send-off, lads? What do yer think of yer uncle now? I'll bet thar ain't ary other galoot among yer that kin pass ther ordeal like

that, an' come out as spotless. A preacher, hey? Haw, haw, haw! That tickles me ter death, that does."

But his merriment had the ring of being assumed. It was not as full and hearty as it might have been. The old hag's remark that she thought a "clean and white record and a future to be proud of" would suit him better than the truth, as she intimated, had dampened his ardor.

"Who's ther next?" he cried, looking around over the group.

"I can't tell any more fortunes now," the old woman spoke up. "It is too early, and I have not had my breakfast. I consider it a good omen to have a call on business before breakfast, and I always hasten to meet it, never charging anything. I thank you, sir."

With that she turned and went immediately back into her tent.

"That's what I call real decent," remarked Bad-man, as he turned away. "That is ther sort of a fortune-teller I like. She's real business, through and through, she is. Come, boyees, let's go an' take somethin' on ther strength o' my bein' a preacher one o' these days. Haw, haw, haw!"

He turned back in the direction of the saloon, the others following.

Later on, when the old hag had breakfasted, and had made an effort toward enhancing her appearance, she appeared on her stool at the door of her tent.

Above her on the flap of the tent hung a small, crude sign, bearing her name and stating that she was the far-famed fortune-teller from the far-away East. And to that was affixed her scale of prices.

A group of idlers was around, as always is the case when there is an object of curiosity to stare at, and as the old hag took her place, after hanging up her sign, she inquired if she could serve any of them. But none of them seemed to have the courage to test her powers.

While they were hanging back, talking among themselves, none very anxious to be the first, a light, airy form suddenly appeared among them, making straight for the place where the old fortune-teller was sitting. It was Flora Dunbarge, and at her coming the men made way before her, each with a respectful good-morning.

She acknowledged with a nod and quiet word, but her face had a troubled look, and she was in a hurry.

"Do you pretend to explain mysteries, old lady?" she hastened to ask.

"Ay, that I do," was the response. "I can tell you what brings you here, if you want proof of it."

The group of men were stepping near to hear what passed. They appeared ready to retreat, however, at the slightest sign from Miss Dunbarge.

"If you can tell me that, it will be proof indeed, for you certainly have no means of guessing. Tell me what my errand is, and if you are right I will pay you well for some information."

"You have come to ask me about a missing lady, a lady of dark complexion, I take her to be—by certain signs in your face of which you know nothing. You have not known the lady long, but she has disappeared and you are very anxious about her."

"How in the world could you know that?" demanded the young lady in great surprise.

"I read it all in your face," was the response. "Now you want me to tell you where this woman is—or at any rate something about her."

"Yes, yes; tell me everything you can, for I am very much troubled about her. Her disappearance was so strange that I am afraid enemies have carried her off."

"Have fears no more on that line," was the assuring answer. "That lady is alive and perfectly well, as I can see. She is in no danger, and is perfectly free, but I cannot tell you where she is nor why she went."

"Why, how is that? If you can tell me so much, Madam Sibyl, why can you not tell me that much more?"

"Is it not plain to you? What she herself would keep secret from you, that I cannot read. My power is limited, after all, you see."

"So it seems, but I am glad for the assurance you have given me that she is alive and well. I suppose she went away from here of her own accord, did she not?"

"Yes, of her own accord, as I can see." "But you cannot tell me why she went."

"No; that I cannot tell."

"Will she return?"

"Oh, yes; it is quite likely that she will re-

turn some time. You will probably hear from her to-day."

"How am I to hear from her? In what manner will she come, if she intends to come at all? I must know that."

"She will not come here to-day, lady, but it is quite probable that you will get a letter, either at the post-office or by messenger. Now, can I tell you anything more?"

Flora Dunbarge was mystified.

How was it possible for any one to have such knowledge?

"No, there is nothing more now," she said. "I may come and see you again on another matter, if what you have told me comes true."

"Very well, my child. I will not attempt to read further now. If I can serve you in any way, come to me."

"I will do so. And now how much is the charge for what you have told me?"

"Nothing. If you think of coming again, let it rest."

So the old hag dismissed her, with a wave of the hand that seemed to bid her depart at once, and tossing some money into her lap, Flora turned away.

The report of this remarkable interview soon spread, and the old hag soon had all the business she could attend to. She told some remarkable fortunes, whether there was anything in her power or not.

And so passed another day without any great excitement. Bad-man Ben had his two shaves in the afternoon, and looked like a freak. The woman barber was kept busy. So was the fortune-teller. The woman of the coffin experience was better, and was out of her room.

Nothing worthy of note took place till evening, when the man who had been sent to learn about the mystery of the coffin returned.

CHAPTER XIX.

SUDDEN AND STARTLING.

THE announcement of his return drew people to the hotel immediately.

Jackson Dunbarge and Hapwood McDonald were among the first, and these were followed by many others.

It was found that the messenger had not returned alone. With him had come a woman—a woman of middle age, small of stature and pleasant of face, but one who, to judge, might be easily imposed upon.

At sight of McDonald she ran toward him with hand outstretched.

"Mr. McDonald," she cried, "forgive me! Things have come to light at home, and we know we wronged you."

"I can readily swear to that, Mrs. Pratley," was the answer, as Hapwood took her hand. "But, tell me, is it true that Myra married that villain?"

"No, thank Heaven, it is not true! There is some mistake. The rascal! We have just discovered some of his villainy. He deserves to be hanged, if ever man did. I—Myra!"

The door had opened, and the young woman of the coffin mystery stood before them, her face sad and pale.

Her mother ran to her, caught her in her arms, and kissed her again and again, fairly crying for joy. However, she was received rather coldly in return.

"It seems impossible that you are alive," the mother cried, "but it is true—it is true! And, thank Heaven, you escaped marrying that villain, even at so great a risk to yourself."

"Escaped marrying him!" the girl cried.

"Am I not his wife, mother?"

"No more than I am, Myra."

"Thank God!"

All attention had been given to this.

Now, however, Jackson Dunbarge, impatient to get at the facts, said:

"Let us have the facts of the matter, madam. We are very curious to know how this mystery came about."

"And suppose we have the messenger's story first," suggested McDonald. "That will bring it about in the right order, I think, sir."

"Very well, that is satisfactory. Tell us your story, James," to the man who had been sent on the errand.

He was a young man, one who had been selected for his intelligence and address.

"It is soon told, sir," said he. "I went there and inquired for Mrs. Pratley, and was shown to this woman's house. I asked for her daughter, and was told, in sorrow, that she was dead and buried. I heard the particulars, which the lady will tell you, and she got ready and came with me. It had just come out that the fellow

Steelforth was a chief of rascals, and the feeling was intense against him, while Mr. McDonald was highly spoken of as a much-slandered young man."

"That is to the point," remarked Dunbarge. "I knew you were the man for the business, James. And now, madam, I suppose you know everything concerning the mysterious way in which your daughter came to us."

"Yes, sir; your man told me all about it, as he claims."

"Very good. Now, please throw some light upon the matter. How in the name of wonders came your daughter to be drifting down the creek in her coffin, so far away from home?"

"I do not know, sir; though I can—"

"The deuce! But, your story."

And seeing it was a woman's story that was coming, the local czar settled back in his chair with a look of patience.

"I will tell you everything about it," Mrs. Pratley began. "Mr. McDonald had been paying attentions to my daughter, and I liked him and offered no objection. But at length came Mr. Steelforth—the rascal! and he was so polished, and so rich, that I believed he would make my daughter a better match, and so urged her to accept his attentions."

"It was of little use, for she would not hear to it, but then came Mr. McDonald's disgrace, which was all brought about by lies told by Steelforth, and by some of his dirty tricks against the young man's character, and I forbade Myra ever to speak to him again. More than that, I commanded her to accept Steelforth, who was more than eager to have her marry him at once."

"Well, seeing that I had to use almost force, I took the matter into my own hands, told Mr. Steelforth (I wonder if that is his name?) he could have her, and set the evening for the wedding, and all. Myra, all the time, was crying and taking on like mad about it, threatening to kill herself if I did not give up my plans and let her remain as she was. But I did not think she would do that, and went right ahead with the preparations."

"The hour came, and I forced Myra to dress and meet Mr. Steelforth in our best room, where the preacher was already awaiting to marry them. At last I got her there, and the ceremony was commenced, when, suddenly, Myra flew back from the man, put a small bottle to her lips and swallowed its contents. She told me it was my fault, and in a few moments more fell to the floor, dead—as we all supposed. I was almost crazed, and events that followed seem like a dream."

"Steelforth went away, with apparently little concern, leaving me alone with my sorrow, and from that moment I hated him, and saw that there was no manhood in him—as compared with McDonald. That was on a Saturday evening. The funeral was on Monday, and my child was laid to rest in the valley burying-place. Steelforth did not even attend the funeral, having gone out of town. And that was the last, I supposing my daughter's body to be in its grave."

"The rest is plain enough," cried McDonald. "That devil must have taken the body from the grave, for the purpose of sending it to me in the manner he did. Now we can understand the terrible import of his note. He deserves to die, and it will not be well for him if we meet. But, thank heaven, he has rendered me the greatest service he possibly could have rendered!"

The young man sprung forward, his face aglow, and caught to his arms the girl he loved, pressing her to his breast.

"Death is what he deserves," cried Dunbarge. "But, it is not likely that you will ever see him again, for after a trick of this sort he would be likely to go as far away as possible."

"And I hope he has," spoke Mrs. Pratley.

At that moment there was a stir near the door, and the old fortune-teller entered the room.

"Hearken to what Madam Sibyl has to say," she piped, in her shrill, shaky tone. "I am here to utter a warning to somebody—have been impelled here to utter a warning. Will you hear what I have to say?"

"Yes," answered McDonald. "Speak out, old woman."

"There is danger, young man, and now I can see that you are the one threatened—you and this lady. Look out! look out!"

"What is the danger?" asked McDonald.

"What is it like?"

"You have an enemy," was the further explanation. "You may think he has gone far away, but he has not. He is near, and knows all that has taken place, whatever it may be—and

I will not stop to read that. Look out for him!"

All looked from one to another in amazement. "Can you not point him out to us?" asked McDonald.

"No; for he is not within sight just now, and I might not be sure of him if I were to try. No, no; I can't do that. But, I have warred you, so be on your guard, and do not give him the opportunity to steal your bride from you."

Abruptly the old hag turned, and in a moment was gone.

McDonald's face was white and stern, while that of the girl was deathly pale.

"You must protect me from him, Hapwood," she faltered. "At any cost you must not let me fall into his hands."

"Will you marry me, here and now?" the young man asked.

"Yes, and gladly," was the reply.

"Let it be done," cried the mother.

It has been mentioned that there was a church at the camp, and the preacher was sent for quickly.

The affair was further discussed while they awaited his coming, but nothing new was brought out. Nothing further could be explained yet.

Presently the preacher arrived, and in the presence of all, the lovers were made one in marriage and McDonald held the right of protector indeed.

About the time when the ceremony ended, something of a startling nature took place.

A great boating and yelling was heard without, at a distance, but coming rapidly nearer.

In another moment a running fire of pistol-shots ensued.

The men in the room sprung to the hall, to get out and learn what it all meant, but they were too late, for while they were pouring into the hall a body of horsemen swept past the hotel, sending a volley of bullets crashing through the windows.

Shouting, screaming and firing, they went past like demons on wing, and by the time the men reached the piazza they were too far off to see what they were like, or to make it any use to fire after them, though a good many shots were sent in the direction of their retreat.

Several persons had been more or less injured by their bullets, and the camp was crazy with rage and excitement in a moment. The men had been masked, it was said by those who had seen them well, and were undoubtedly outlaws. Here was something new in the experience of Satan's Delight, and the czar of the camp rose in his might and registered a vow that he would scour the country but he would wipe the rascals out.

CHAPTER XX.

DEVIL DUVAL'S DOING.

BUT there was more to this sudden raid than appeared on the surface, as was soon to be made known.

Presently two women were seen running from the direction of the Dunbarge residence, screaming as they came. And as they drew nearer it was seen that they were Mrs. Dunbarge and her servant.

"Help!" they cried. "Help! Help! Flora has been carried off by those outlaws! Save her! Oh! save my child! Jackson, send men after them as speedily as you can! Oh! my child, my child!"

"What is this?" Dunbarge thundered. "Flora has been carried off, do you say? Quick, men, your horses! Every man who has a horse, let him get it as soon as he can! A thousand dollars to the man who will rescue my daughter from their hands!"

Now the camp was wild indeed.

Men hastened in every direction, eager to be off in the pursuit.

It was a time of keenest anxiety not only for the parents of the beautiful girl but for the whole camp.

Useless to try to describe what the excitement was like, and much more so to attempt to set forth what was said by the chief characters. Everybody was interested, strangers as well as citizens.

Lord Brandt Comingway, on the piazza of the Mountain Mansion, with his statue in buttons immediately behind him, was interested in everything—perhaps thoughtful for his own safety and calculating the earliest possible time for him to get out of so wild a place.

Bad-man Ben was roaring and howling around like a crazy man, offering his services if somebody would provide him with a horse. A horse

was all he wanted. It was the burden of his cry. A horse, a horse! And he was willing to give his kingdom for it. He made more fuss and noise than any half-dozen other men in the excited crowd.

In a brief time a body of horsemen was assembled, and they were about to set out when a single horseman was seen coming swiftly from the direction of the canyon where the outlaws had made their exit.

He drew rapidly near, and soon it was discovered that he carried a woman in front of him, half supporting her with his arms.

Another moment and he was at hand, and was recognized. It was Richmond Danewood, and the woman was Flora Dunbarge! It was a welcome sight, and Dunbarge greeted the man heartily.

"I was in the nick of time," Danewood remarked. "I met the rascals in the canyon, sah, and the young lady let out a cry for help. By gad, sah, no woman ever appeals in vain to a Southern gentleman, and I tackled them single-handed. I seized your daughter and tore her from their hands, as she can tell you, and away we came."

"Good for you!" cried Dunbarge. "I won't soon forget the service, sir. But how did you get off with your life?"

"Owing to the darkness, and to the fact that their weapons were empty for the most part. Hammers enough clicked, but only two or three shots came after us."

Flora had been let down, and was in her mother's arms, weeping.

And now little time was lost, when Dunbarge set off in pursuit of the villains with the intention of fully carrying out his threats.

It had been a timely rescue, and Danewood was the hero of the hour. He was loudly cheered, and everybody wanted to shake hands with him, but he soon got out of sight in the house, and was seen no more.

The hour was late when Dunbarge returned. His pursuit had been a fruitless one. The outlaws were not to be found. But this did not end it, he vowed, for on the morrow he would send his men out again to scour the country for them. They should not be allowed to remain in that section.

In the morning there was new cause for excitement for the camp. And it was such as to occasion even a greater stir than anything that had preceded it.

The early risers found a man on the street, between the bridge and the hotel, a man bound hand and foot, and apparently dying. Blood was all over his face and breast, and a note was pinned to him.

It was this note that made the stir, more than the finding of the man under the circumstances described. It was addressed to the citizens of the camp, and was signed by no less a personage than the notorious outlaw, Devil Duval!

It ran as follows:

"RESPECTED CITIZENS OF SATAN'S DELIGHT:—

"Here is the cuss who carried off the young woman last night. I owed him a grudge, and this is the way I have squared it. If you find him alive, finish him by hanging. You needn't look any further for me around here. I'm off to pastures new. Your man Dunbarge is too many for me to tackle, so I'm going to move out. With my best compliments, I am yours for life and liberty—

"DEVIL DUVAL."

The discoverers raised such a hullabaloo that the whole camp was speedily out on the street.

Men ran to the spot from every direction, among them Jackson Dunbarge, who happened to be up early. And by the time he came up, it had been discovered that the man's tongue was cut out!

"Good heavens!" Dunbarge cried, "what is the meaning of this? Who is this poor devil? Who has done this hellish deed?"

The note was handed to him, and that explained it all—or all that any one knew about it. It was a piece of work that was certainly worthy the reputation that notorious outlaw had well earned.

"So, Devil Duval has been here, has he?" cried the czar. "But there is more about this matter than this note explains," he added. "What connection had this man with the band he was with? Is he one of Duval's men?"

At that instant a cry of recognition was uttered.

Hapwood McDonald had just come upon the scene, and it was uttered by him.

"This man is Wardman Steelforth!" was the excited exclamation. "How came he here, and in this condition?"

"Wardman Steelforth!" cried Dunbarge. "If so, he has met no worse a fate than he deserved,

scarcely. He met this at the hands of Devil Duval."

"That 'ar is a mighty fancy name ther cuss is sailin' under now, by durn if it ain't," cried Hard-pan Smith. "When I knowed him last he was plain Hugh Dogan, an' nothin' else."

At this the dying man—for dying he certainly was—turned his eyes quickly upon Hard-pan Smith, and a light of recognition shone in them.

"Oh, it ar' me, sure enough," Hard-pan assured. "I'm ther same cuss what yer robbed ther night yer slunk off after bein' my pard fer months, an' me nussin' you out of a spell o' fever. It looks as if ther fowls hev come home ter roost."

"It's too bad the man's tongue has been cut out," spoke Dunbarge. "He might tell us something. That has been done with a purpose."

"Yer kin bet it hev," agreed Hard-pan. "Free his hands, though, and let him write. He kin write like a greased streak, Hugh Dogan kin; I've seen him do it lots o' times."

"Just the thought!" cried the czar. "Free him and bring him into the house."

The fellow's hands were freed, and he was carried into the bar-room and put on a chair at one of the tables, and paper and pencil were put before him.

He was too weak to sit alone, so had to be held up. He took the pencil, with seeming eager haste, and with great effort proceeded to write, in a rapid, running but staggering hand.

"It is true," he wrote, "that my name is Dogan, as Smith says. It is all up with me, and I'm fixed as maybe I deserved. I'm dying, Smith, and if you will forgive me, do it. I don't deserve it, I know."

The pencil dropped from his fingers, and had to be recovered. He was in terrible agony, and was growing weaker each moment.

"You had better be brief, and right to the point," advised Dunbarge.

"Will try to," the pencil worded. "Much to tell. To McDonald—I was your enemy. C. argues all false. I have been a devil. I took Myra's body from the grave, brought it to Cheyenne Crossing and set it adrift on the creek. Had no idea she was alive. Seems like hand Providence."

Again did the pencil drop.

"I was head of band outlaws—Too hot—Came Cheyenne—Played game to win high—Failed—Fell in with Devil Du—"

Pencil dropped.

"—Duval—Joined forces with—"

The pencil fell for the last time, and the arm dropped heavily. It was useless to expect more from the nerveless fingers.

With a groan the wretch sunk back in his chair, and whatever more he might have told was sealed forever. In a few minutes more he was dead.

A solemn hush was over all, and McDonald was the first to break the silence.

"May God forgive him, as I do!" he spoke.

"Too bad he couldn't live to tell us more," remarked Dunbarge.

"Yes, that's true; his secret dies with him. Do you think Duval has really gone away, as his note declares?"

"Yes; I believe he has. It was too hot for him here—or would have been, and he no doubt knew it. I guess we shall not be troubled with him further."

The body was laid out, and later on was decently buried. There was no mourner, though Hard-pan Smith followed to the grave the man who had once been his partner and companion.

He told all he could about the fellow. He had been educated, but had committed some crime in the East that had forced him to seek refuge in the wilds of the West. He was a bad character generally, and the more so as he could ape the honest gentleman at will.

But, his career was ended, and the world was well rid of him, and so ends that part of our romance in which he was concerned.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MARVELOUS RESCUE.

TIME passed. Nothing further was seen or heard of the outlaws, and it was taken for granted that they had gone.

Two weeks went by, without working any changes at the camp. Strangers came and went, as ever, and the place ran along in the even tenor of its way as it had done before the exciting events recorded.

Lord Brandt Comingway and his statue in buttons was still at the Mountain Mansion, and

seemed likely to remain for an indefinite period. His lordship was looking his eyes sore for an expected remittance which thus far had failed to materialize, and could not go further until it came.

The woman barber was still at the Come Over Here, and was reaping a golden harvest, but had announced that in another week she would move on to some other camp. She gave no reason. And the old fortune-teller was still hanging on, though her services were no longer in demand, except occasionally. And Bad-man, too, was still there, enjoying his two shaves every day, and going around looking like a branded monkey.

One forenoon, about this time, Flora Dunbarge paid a visit to the tent of the old fortune-teller.

She was welcomed by the old bag, who declared she could tell her what business had brought her there again, and Flora challenged her to do so.

"You have come to have me tell you what to do regarding Mr. Danewood," the old woman asserted positively. "He has asked for your hand, your father has given his consent, but your heart is in doubt."

"That is it, in few words," the girl had to confess. "It is true; and there should be nothing but obedience on my part, but my heart is full of fears."

"And your heart is right," the old woman piped. "Take my warning, fair lady, and do not marry Richmond Danewood, even though he appear an angel in your eyes and lay the wealth of the world at your feet!"

The young woman drew back struck with horror.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Step into my tent," was the answer, "and let me tell you a long story. Then you will understand."

The old bag rose and went into her small tent, and Flora, greatly impressed, followed after her. Little did she dream of the revelation to be made there.

When, at the end of an hour, the young lady came out and went away, her face was pale and drawn, and she looked greatly troubled, yet seemed fired with firm resolution.

That evening Danewood called to see her, and finally put the great question—the question to which she had promised an answer on this occasion.

She acted strangely unlike her usual self, as he had noticed, but she had given as an excuse that she was not feeling well.

"I am not quite ready yet," she said in response. "You shall have my answer at sunrise, however."

"At sunrise!" exclaimed Danewood, filled with wonder. "That is an early hour, Flora."

"Yes, I know; but the fairest hour. Meet me at Flat Rock, exactly at sunrise, and there I will give you my answer."

The girl would give no reason for this freak, nor would she change the decision, so Danewood had to accept the proposition.

Flat Rock was a small plateau, jutting out from the bold face of the mountain, out of sight from the camp, and the only known approach to which was a narrow and rugged trail.

Above this rock was a stretch of bare wall, hundreds of feet high. Below was a sheer descent into a yawning gorge. It was a favorite spot for visitors to the camp to ascend to, to witness the mountain sunrise, so after all it was nothing more than strikingly romantic, perhaps, that the young lady had chosen it.

Next morning, when the sun peeped above the distant peaks and cast its first ray on Flat Rock, Richmond Danewood was near the place of meeting.

In a moment more he stepped out upon the rock, eager to see whether the young woman was there ahead of him or not, when, what was his amazement to see there, with his arms folded and gazing away at the sun, Lord Brandt Comingway!

"Hello! you here, sab?" he demanded.

"Aw, beg pawdon," responded the Britisher, looking around with a start. "Hi ham bout to see the sunrise this morning."

"So I see; and it is quite an unexpected meeting, sab. Didn't know you were in the habit of coming up here, sab. You know a good thing when you see it."

"Hi 'ave been 'ere once before," was explained, "hand Hi hadmire the hawful grandeur of the place. What ha' orrible place hit would be to fight ha' duel to the death."

Something caused Danewood to give a start. And, in the same instant, another voice rung out sharp and clear:

"Up wid yer hands there, ye murtherin' scum av the earth, or it is riddlin' ye wid buckshot Oi'll be doin'!"

Danewood turned deathly pale, and glanced over his shoulder. There stood the Englishman's statue in buttons, covering him with a terrible-looking musket. And in the same instant the Britisher whipped a pair of revolvers from under his coat, leveled them at Danewood, and cried:

"Craig Morgan, we meet again, and this time is the last! One or the other of us will never leave this rock alive. You are trapped, and I need not tell you who I am."

"Dick Darrel!" the scoundrel cried, perspiration standing out upon his forehead. "Then it was a trick, and that girl was your tool. Curse her! I will get even with her for this!"

"No you won't," said Dick, grimly. "You will settle your account with me, here and now! You tricked and trapped me neatly, but Providence aided my escape, and I have paid you back in your own coin. It is your life or mine, Craig Morgan, and you have got to fight me or die like a cur."

"Bet yer loife on it!" cried Barney O'Linn, the statue in buttons, with his big gun well to the front. "Thry to escape this way, an' be hivving it's hash Oi will make av ye instanter, so Oi will."

The first shock of surprise over, the arch knave's courage was returning to him, and he cried:

"Well, so be it, then; for I have a score to settle with you for killing my brave little woman the night you escaped from me."

"I am not guilty of anything of the kind," declared Dick. "I have heard all about it, however, and could point out the guilty one if I would. I am not a murderer, like yourself."

"Curse you! you lie!"

"You know better, for you know Dick Darrel is no liar."

"Then tell me who did kill her. It was that gambler queen, then, Lady Tiger—as she was called, who set you free that night."

"No; it was not she, either, nor did she set me free, as you will know if you stop to think. That Mexican lady was the Lady Tiger, and she was in the hotel long before I was freed."

"Curse it, that's so! Then, who was it? Come, I demand to know that much before we fight."

"And I refuse to tell you. Prepare yourself now. Drop your revolvers and grip your knife, if you have got one; if not, take this."

Dandy Dick threw a knife to the outlaw, it landing at his feet, and having cautioned Barney to keep the drop on him and to shoot him at the first sign, proceeded to take off his false hair and beard, and to lay aside coat and vest.

That long-wished-for hour was his at last, and it did not seem that there could be any possible escape this time. It must be a fight, and a fight to the finish. Only one, and very likely neither, would leave that narrow rock alive. Perhaps both would be plunged into the gorges below.

Presently Craig Morgan, he too having discarded his disguise and all superfluous clothing, picked up his knife and faced his foe—the man whom he had wronged so terribly.

His face was pale, but his jaws were firmly set and his resolution was read in his burning eyes. It was the same with Dick Darrel.

At last they were face to face, and the time of vengeance was at hand!

As on previous occasions, it would be death to the outlaw in any event, and he knew it. His one purpose was to have the final satisfaction of killing Darrel in the fight.

Even then, he knew that the young Irishman would certainly shoot him, but he did not mention that, since it would be useless. As he had lived, so would he die. It would be useless to seek any terms, and he would not condescend to ask any.

Face to face, now, with nerves and muscles tightened for the encounter, and each taking a last full breath while Barney was counting three, when they were to spring upon each other.

But, suddenly, everything was changed.

Something shot out through the air, with a whirring sound, and a lasso coiled around the outlaw's body.

The next instant, and before Dick or Barney could act, the man was jerked off his feet, and went toppling over the edge of the plateau!

"My God!" cried Dandy Dick, "I am cheated again!"

Then, realizing that he was an open target, he sprung for the clothes he had discarded, with a word to Barney, and as soon as they had gather-

ed them up, the disguise of the outlaw as well, they crept around to the narrow trail, where they knew they were safe.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN UNUSUAL ENDING.

DANDY DICK was in despair. How the man had been snatched out of his power was a mystery. He could not understand it. It was something that he would have said was an utter impossibility.

"Barney," he spoke, "after all our trouble, all our planning, we have met defeat for a third time. Are we never to have the revenge that is justly ours? I begin to fear it."

"It begins to look that way, begob!" cried Barney. "But, come; let us hasten to the camp, an' maybe Oi will have a chance to settle the score wid that murtherin' villain av a Maron. Sure, we know he is there."

"I am afraid not, Barney. This rescue of the chief of the rascals seems to indicate that they have circumvented us in some way, and that he has had a hand in it. It is possible that woman has been the means of blocking our plans again, though I do not see how."

"Nor I aythur, begob. But we can't do harrum to her, afther what she has done for us, Masther Dick."

"Indeed, no. But, come, let us don our disguises again, and get to the camp."

On second thought, however, Dick decided not to reassume the disguise, and they set out immediately, clothed as they were.

When they entered the camp their appearance created a sensation, and when they went straight to the hotel, and Dick made a prisoner of Walton Turgee, great excitement prevailed.

Dick sent immediately for Jackson Dunbarge, and in a manner that admitted of no delay, and which was sure to bring him, and the czar was speedily on hand with all his men at his back.

He had expected to meet a horde of outlaws, or to find the camp in their possession.

Seeing the Englishman and his flunkies so transformed, filled him with greatest amazement, but Dick hurriedly explained, telling his story.

That story was listened to with amazement and awe, and the camp was fired with indignation and a desire to lynch the arch demon.

Horsemen were soon got ready, and, headed by Dick, they made a raid on that mountain cavern, taking prisoner a man who happened to be there, and carrying away whatever was worth taking, or that was needed in proving Danewood and Devil Duval to have been one and the same.

The prisoner showed the white feather immediately, and was only too eager to tell all he could.

Arriving at the camp, he was given a hearing, when he disclosed some facts of interest. The chief of the band had been Hugh Dogan, or "Wardman Steelforth"—as we have known of him. Devil Duval had fallen in with him, and they had joined forces. Dogan wanted to carry off Flora Dunbarge, while Duval wanted to win her in marriage. They had suspected each other, and had been on the watch. At last Dogan succeeded in kidnapping her, but Duval was ready for him, and the result has been shown. It was a clever play on the part of Duval, and it won his cause for him with Mr. Dunbarge. The woman they had tried to take in the first instance had been Mary Warne, in her disguise as "Inez Monica."

"Walton Turgee," who admitted that his true name was Hamps, was another of the band. He told about Morgan's taking the hotel to serve his purpose as a disguise while he planned the robbery of the bullion storehouse of the Gold Drop Mine, a scheme he and the man Dogan had hatched.

And then came Rusty Leary with a story of a scene that had taken place in his saloon late on the previous night. Bad-man Ben had come in for a third shave, ordering a strip to be taken out under his jaw. He was under the influence of drink, and was the last man in the saloon. When the woman barber got him in the chair, she suddenly stood over him like a tigress;

threatening to cut his throat if he did not tell her something she desired to know. He was the worst frightened man Leary had ever seen, and he gave the information without a murmur.

This explained much. Dandy Dick had known that the barber was no other than the woman, Pearl Mayne, in disguise, and also that Bad-man Ben was Owen Maron. This was the means she had taken to make him reveal the identity of Morgan. Next morning she was on the watch for him, and perhaps Maron with her, and by that means must have seen him go out of the camp, followed, and so must have come about the rescue in the manner shown. So it had been, and the guess was near the truth. It is quite useless to explain every detail.

It had been a hard struggle this time—a "tough tussle," indeed. It had been a game of wits, backed up by the keenest acting possible. Dick and his party had got on track of their foe, and had come to Satan's Delight prepared for a hard campaign. The outlaws, on the other hand, had discovered them before their work was begun, had learned their plans for the first move, and laid counter plots with the success the opening chapters show. They had not known, however, that Dick was prepared for a sudden change of disguise, should the case require it, and had everything for it carefully hid away in the hills.

As soon after their escape as possible they had assumed the second disguise, and had made their appearance in the camp before it could be suspected that they had had time to appear in new concealment of identity. Needless to say that the old fortune-teller was Dick's brave helper, Mary Warne! And this made known, other points can be readily understood without explanation.

With success so near—that is, the only success he craved—a meeting with his foe, Dandy Dick felt his disappointment the more. He was almost discouraged, but he would not—could not give up. The wrongs he had suffered were of too great magnitude for anything but death to satisfy—the death of his implacable foe. Once again did he register his vow, and his allies with him, that life and all should be laid on the altar of their vengeance.

Meanwhile, of course, steps had been taken toward capturing the outlaw, if he had escaped with his life, but all in vain. A thorough survey of the plateau revealed the fact that there was another trail leading to it, coming from another direction, but lower down, passing a few feet under the ledge of the upper plateau on the left. From that point the lariat had been thrown, and to that point, if he had escaped, the chief had been drawn after his sudden taking from the ledge above. It had been a daring chance for life, and one which he would never have risked of his own will, perhaps. Had it been a successful one? Or had all found death in the gorge? No one could say, though nothing was to be found of either the chief, Bad-man, or the woman barber, from that hour.

If alive, they knew it would be death to them to appear at the camp, so they must have hastened away.

Arrests had followed, and no mercy was shown the rascals, where the proof was positive.

With the next stage that left the camp went Dandy Dick and his allies, leaving behind them warmest friends. Where they were going, and what their next move would be, no one could say. All depended upon the future movements of their enemy.

What was to be the next scene in this drama of vengeance?

THE END.

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